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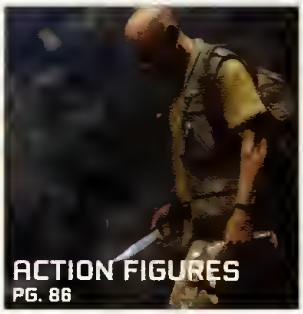


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MINI BOSS

Take a deep breath, close your eyes, and savor this moment with me. You're holding an issue of *PCXL*. Think about what that means. This is a magazine that for the past seven years was wiped from all existence, relegated only to the realm of anecdotal nostalgia. But sure enough, it's really here, in your hands right now. How the hell did this happen?!

For the most part, you can credit Greg Vederman – the End Boss (pg. 94) – for birthing the idea of this magazine. A few months ago, over lunch, Greg and I were discussing possible topics for *PC Gamer*'s next special issue. Mulling over dozens of ideas (a lot of them terrible ones), we eventually kept coming back to a few that jumped out at us: profiles of gaming lifestyle, trends, and culture. We knew we could have at good time exploring and poking fun these topics, fun that would hopefully be shared by readers enjoying this issue. It was then that Greg pointed out: "Hey, this sounds a lot like *PC Accelerator*." A light switch had clicked in our heads, and we decided to run with it.

PCXL has always been about indulging in the geek and gamer lifestyle. Back in 2000, that lifestyle might've just meant playing games and ogling girls (and maybe that's what made *PCXL* ahead of its time), but the climate of gaming culture today encompasses so much more than that. And whether you believe it or not, we gamers do populate a culture. We have our own clothing styles (pg. 10), kooky trends like gamecakes (pg. 26), bustling online communities (pg. 74), and even huge social gatherings to celebrate our collective geekiness (pg. 22).

We also have the Frag Dolls, a clan of gamers who're sort of an anomaly in the games business. Smart, sassy, and definitely serious about gaming, these stunning young women seem to be leading the charge to merge the geek and the chic. We unleashed Greg on an undercover mission (read: date) with the Frag Dolls to uncover their secrets (pg 38).

And just as gaming culture has come a long way since *PCXL* closed its doors (and broke my 15-year-old heart), our games have evolved to astonishing new degrees of awesomeness. If the staff of *PCXL* was enamored with *Quake 3* when it first came out, they'd be convulsing with never-ending geekgasms over new games like *Cyrsis* and *Unreal Tournament 3* (pg. 58). Luckily, we were able to round up a few ex-*PCXL* staffers to give their take on the modern gaming scene.

These are truly exciting times for gamers, and I couldn't be happier that *PCXL* is back (at least for one issue) to share that excitement with you. As a devoted *PCXL* reader myself (no joke – I was the president of the *PCXL* club in high school), helming this issue has fulfilled one of my longtime dreams (next on the list: holding hands with a girl). I hope that our efforts here live up to the *PCXL* legacy; we're definitely proud of the outcome. And if you have any comments or want to see more *PCXL* issues, please send me feedback at norman@pcgamer.com.



NORMAN CHAN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



The Frag Dolls reveal themselves on page 38

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GAMES :: GEAR :: GIRLS :: GADGETS
Fall 2007

EDITORIAL
EDITOR IN CHIEF **Norman Chan**
EDITORIAL VISIONARY **Greg Vederman**
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS **Logan Decker, Dan Egger, David Murphy, Chuck Osborn, Andy Salisbury, Kristen Salvatore, Rob Smith, Dan Stapleton, Zack Stern, Greg Vederman**

ART
ART DIRECTOR **Sean DallasKidd**
GROUP CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Dan Fitzpatrick**
PHOTOGRAPHERS **Mark Madeo, Samantha Berg**

BUSINESS
PUBLISHER **Dan Morris, dmorris@futureus.com**
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR (BAY AREA) **Christina Perez**
650-238-2504, cperez@futureus.com
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE (WEST COAST) **Benjamin Alessio**
650-238-2326, balessio@futureus.com
DIRECTOR OF CORP SALES & MARKETING **Jim Schiekoier**
646-723-5410, jschiekoier@futureus.com
CORPORATE SALES MANAGER (WEST) **Matt Strada**
562-953-5084, mstrada@futureus.com
CORPORATE SALES MANAGER (MIDWEST) **Jodi Sosna**
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DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT **Bill Keichner**
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GAMES **David Cooper**
646-723-5447, dcooper@futureus.com
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR, GAMES **Nate Nunt**
415-269-5402, nhunt@futureus.com
WESTERN ADVERTISING DIRECTOR **David Lynn**
969-365-4443. dlynn@futureus.com
EASTERN ADVERTISING MANAGER, HARDWARE **Larry Presser**
646-723-5459, lpresser@futureus.com
MARKETING DIRECTOR **Shawn Roberts**
650-238-2556, sroberts@futureus.com
MARKETING MANAGER **Andrea Recio-Ang**
650-238-2565, arecio-ang@futureus.com
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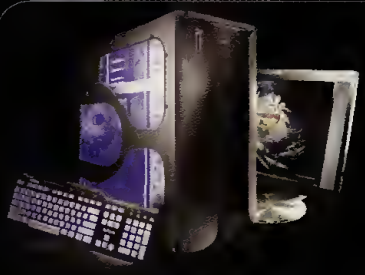
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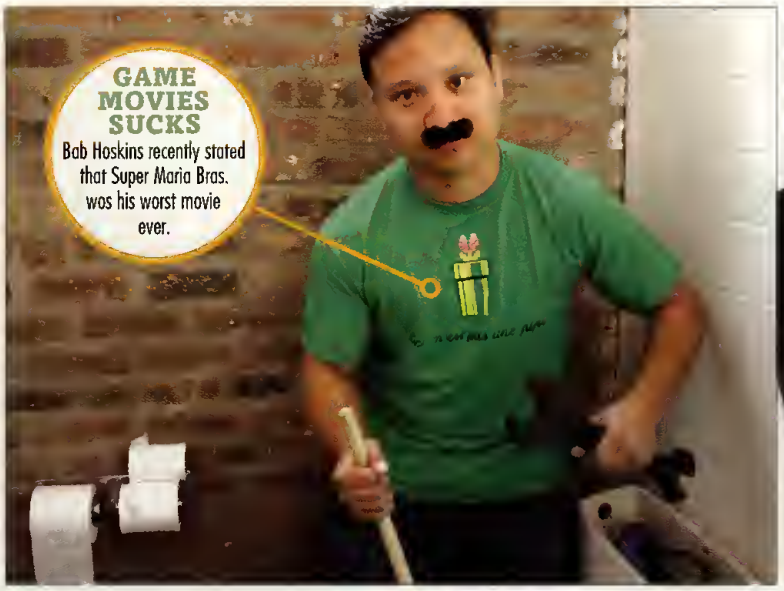
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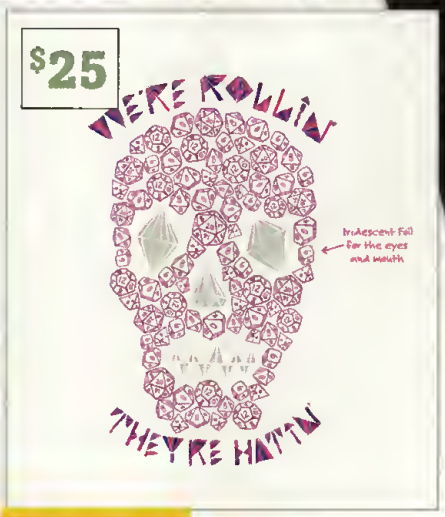
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HOW-TO: COSPLAY

:: ONLY IF REPRODUCTION ISN'T YOUR HIGHEST PRIORITY

COSPLAY DONT'S

DON'T:



- Be a Stormtrooper. Any fanboy can visit studiocreations.com and buy a Stormtrooper armor kit. If you have to show your love for Star Wars, try dressing up as a non-human Jedi.



- Wear spandex under any circumstances. No one wants to see your man-junk. Painted muscles over spandex just adds insult to injury.



- Involve your children. Forcing your kids to play dress-up with you at a nerd fest is the quickest way to preparing yourself for years of psychiatry bills. A five-year-old might look adorable as R2D2 to your C3PO, but they're probably crying on the inside.



We have great respect for Cosplayers. It takes a lot of gravitas and self-confidence to walk into a convention full of thousands of critical spectators wearing a paper mache mask and form-revealing tights. Just remember, dear Cosplayer, we're laughing at you, not with you.

COSPLAY DO'S

DO:

- Work in groups. Ensemble pieces are much more impressive than solo jobs, even if your costumes aren't professional quality. One dude wearing painted cardboard boxes looks like a loser, but get five guys to do the same and you'll have a *Tetris* party.



- Create outfits of badass characters. If you're going to spend hours making a costume to wear at a convention, it's better to go as a character that's known for kicking ass than one that looks like one.



- Put on outfits that fit your physique. Take a look at your size and physical attributes. If you've had a few too many fish tacos, you're not going to convince anyone that you're Luke Skywalker. Maybe Malakili the Roncor keeper is more your style.

CONVENTION PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM EDWARDS

THE HOME PAGE

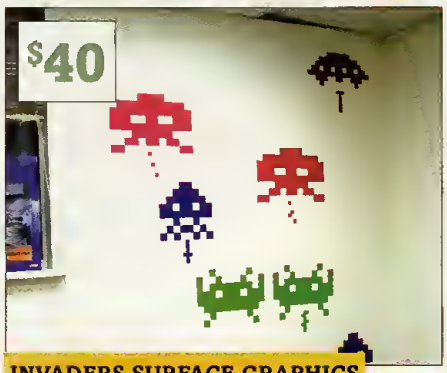
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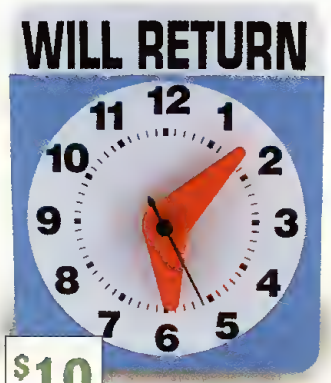
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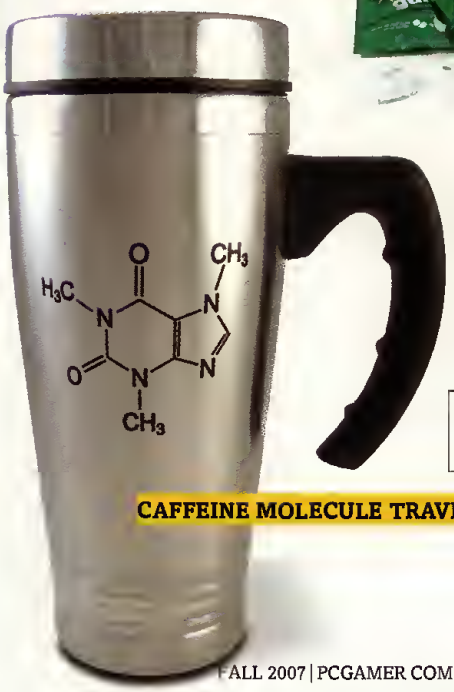
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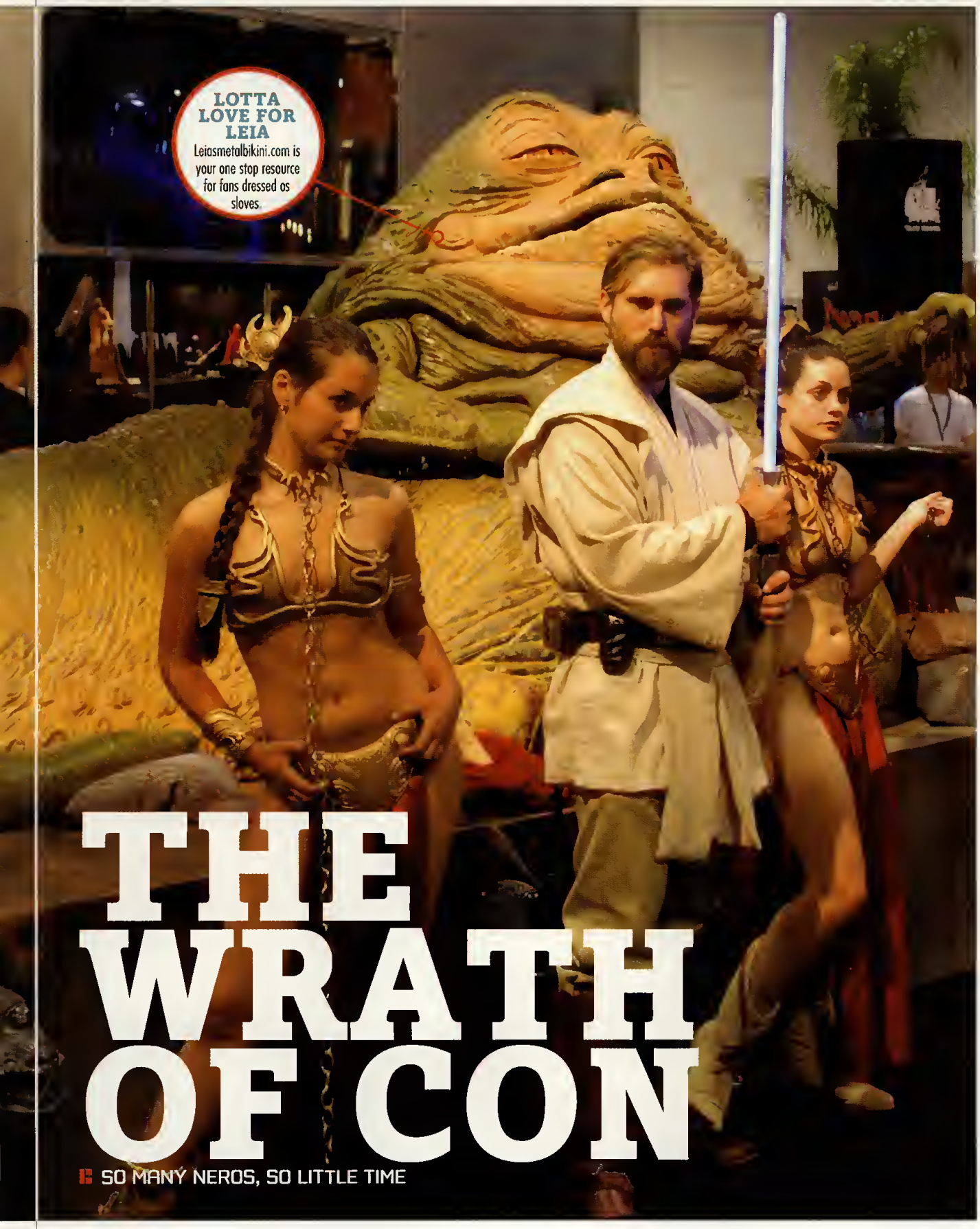
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TRENDS

INSIDE THIS SECTION:

FINDING YOUR GEEK MECCA
CREATIVE CULINARY CRAFTSMENSHIP
WHY LATENCY IS FOR LOSERS
SUPPORT GROUP FOR WOW PET ADDICTS
THE BEST USE OF *GUITAR HERO*
BOOKS ARE LIKE MAGAZINES BUT THICKER
STUFF WE LOVE TO GET FOR FREE



LOTTA LOVE FOR LEIA

Leiasmetalbikini.com is your one stop resource for fans dressed os sloves.

THE WRATH OF CON

SO MANY NERDS, SO LITTLE TIME



Marketers take note: this is the best place to give out deordorant samples.

The word is out: conventions are the place to be to celebrate your love for games and gaming culture with fellow enthusiasts. Instead of backpacking through Europe during their summer vacation, geeks are road-tripping across the country to expos where they can get sneak peeks of upcoming games and meet fellow fans to revel in the glory of their beloved hobby. Nowhere else will you find that the coolest person in the room is a Level 70 *World of Warcraft* player dressed as one of their Level 70 *World of Warcraft* characters.

COMIC CON

(WWW.COMIC-CON.ORG)

What began as a small gathering of 500 comic book fanatics in the 1970's has transformed into the Mecca for all things cool. Over 150,000 people attended this year's San Diego event, which traditionally runs from Thursday through Sunday in the last weekend of July. While Hollywood has essentially taken over the show with its flashy presentations and towering booth setups, game publishers are moving into the scene to fill the vacuum left by a diminished E3. If you've never been to Comic-Con, you owe it to yourself to mark July24-27th in your 2008 calendar and head on down to witness the spectacle for yourself.

NORM'S 5 TIPS TO SURVIVING COMIC-CON

1 Buy your passes early. All four days of this year's event sold out, and all major hotels in San Diego were booked to over 99% occupancy. Procrastinators and economically minded attendees who don't want to pay $400 a night for a hotel room may have to stay as far as 15 miles away from the Convention Center.

2 The best freebies are in Hall H. Only a lucky 6,500 people get to fit into this air-conditioned presentation room, where Hollywood previews its latest flicks. The big studios like Warner Bros. and Paramount usually hand out gift bags with limited-edition swag, some of which go for a killing on eBay!

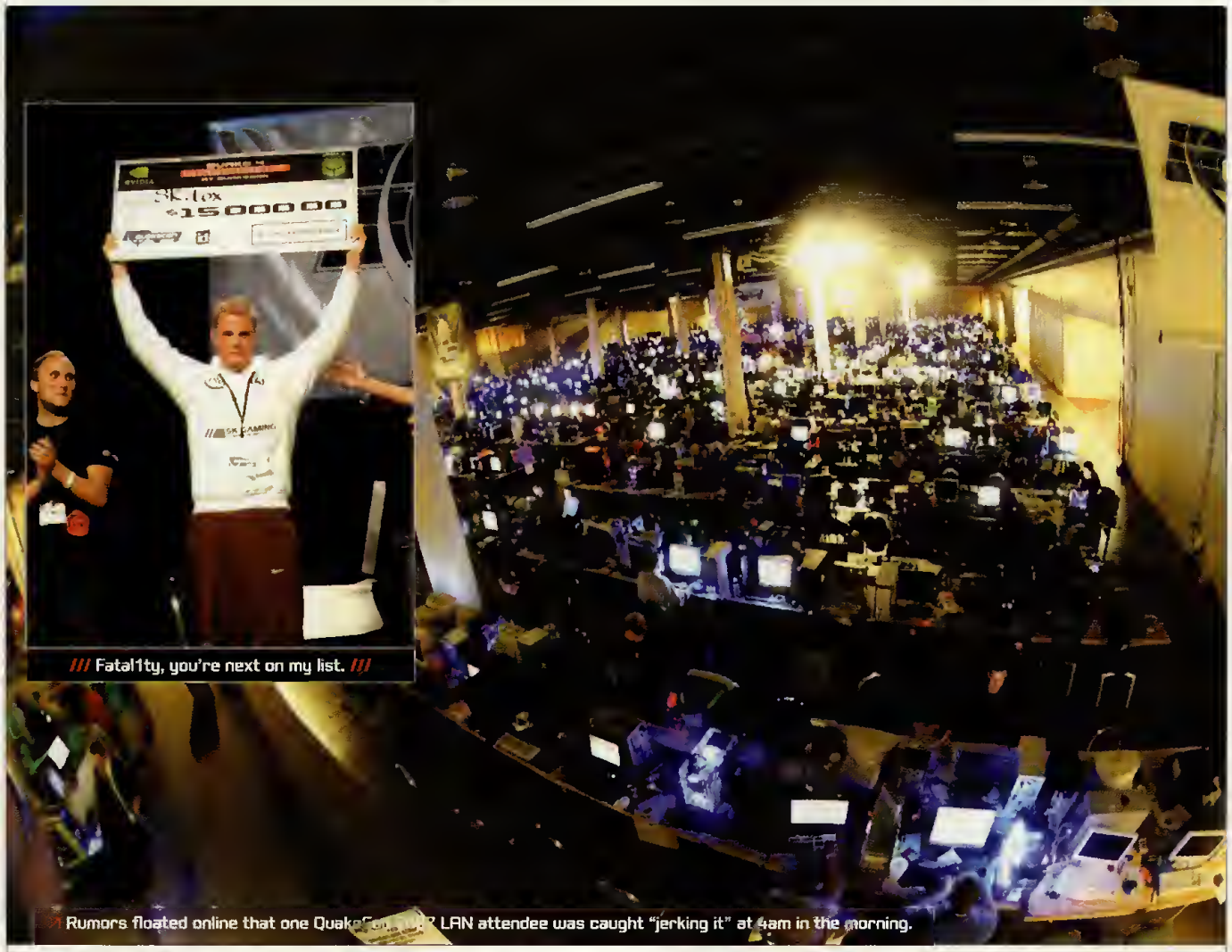
3 Avoid the main hall on Saturday. The 100,000 people packing the main expo floor on the biggest day of Comic-Con makes navigating through sweaty crowds a daunting experience.

4 Bring a sketchbook and cardboard poster tube. Wednesday and Thursday are the best days to walk away with cool posters and swag from exhibitors. If you have the patience to wait in line, you can also walk away with some free sketches from prominent artists.

5 Attend the Masquerade. First-time goers shouldn't miss out on the annual costume contest on Saturday night. The mix of elaborate musical performances, complex transforming costumes, and the finest cosplay couture is awe-inspiring. Especially if you're drunk.



/// Weirdest casting call, ever. ///



/// Fatal1ty, you're next on my list. ///

Rumors floated online that one Quake[illegible] LAN attendee was caught "jerking it" at 4am in the morning.

PENNY ARCADE EXPO

[WWW.PENNYARCADEEXPO.COM]

In the hierarchy of nerds, two people stand tall above the crowd as the masters of geekdom. Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik, the creators of Penny-Arcade, have so many fans that their annual PAX festival draws thousands of gamers (approximately 30,000 this year) to Washington for three days of computer, console, and tabletop gaming. Gaming music concerts, discussion panels, tournaments and parties are on the busy schedule for attendees, anchored this year by a keynote provided by geek god Wil Wheaton (Wesley Crusher from *Star Trek*). The highlight of PAX, though, is the Omegathon, a grandiose tournament pitting 20 "Omeganauts" in a series of tabletop and video games to win an ultimate prize. Last year's bounty was a decked out Scion, while this year's winner will earn a trip to the Tokyo Game Show. When webcomic creators have enough clout to give away a car, you know they're not playing around.

QUAKECON

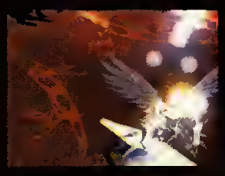
[WWW.QUAKECON.ORG]

As one of the longest running gaming conventions, QuakeCon has been a reliably fun meetup for gamers looking to get their frag on. It's an event that was created by *Quake* fans who met on IRC, and continues to be run by dedicated volunteers. 6,000 people attended this year's gathering, the 12th since it began in 1996. The developers at id Software spend time with gamers to get feedback about their old games and drop some hints on their upcoming projects. If you've ever wanted to pick the brain of John Carmack, QuakeCon is the place to do it.

BLIZZCON

[WWW.BLIZZCON.COM]

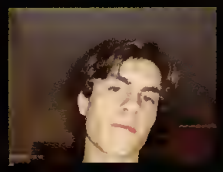
Without a doubt, the most devoted and rabid gamers are the *World of Warcraft* players. For people who've spent 40 hours a week online leveling up their characters and engaging in epic PVP battles, making the trek to BlizzCon, Blizzard's semi-regular games convention, is a no-brainer. In fact, tickets to this year's convention sold out in only three days after organizers announced that attendees would get the world's first hands-on time with StarCraft II. Exclusive Blizzard merchandise, a free *WoW* in-game item, and a sneak peek at Blizzard's secretive movie projects was more than enough to deliver a geekgasm to gamers already enveloped in Blizzard's finely crafted gaming worlds.







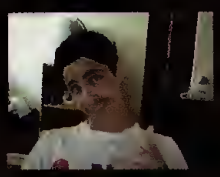
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GAMECAKES

IT WHEN FOOD AND GAMES UNITE, WORLD PEACE CAN'T BE FAR BEHIND



This *Fallout 3* cake looks destructively delicious!

What's better than beating *Mario Bros.* world 8-4? Here's a hint; it's definitely not the ending. It's the sweet piece of delicious Mario Cake you enjoy while the credits are rolling. Yes, that's right. Mario Cake. It's not the latest pixel-pumping offering for the Nintendo DS, but a new way to combine an obsession with the kitchen and a love for the controller.

And really, all you have to do to contribute to the phenomenon is bake a cake. That's it. You don't have to be a hardcore gamer; you don't even have to beat any *Legend of Zelda* games (we won't tell anybody). Just look at Martha Stewart. She's as far from "Fatal1ty" as a person could get, yet even the homemaker herself lent a hand in the creation of a Wii-themed cake for Wired magazine's August 2007 cover.



Still, there's something to be said for endowing one's delectables with a love of the genre. Craftsmanship and attention to detail makes a video game cake stand out from plain old grocery store cake, which is exactly why we enjoy "The *Sonic the Hedgehog* Cake" currently featured on the gaming blog Kotaku. The baker, a woman named Ana, perfectly captures the sharpness of the sprite in her faithful, undoubtedly tasty recreation of Sega's ultimate franchise.

If fancier pastries are more your liking, check out "The *WoW* Alliance Cake," found on the same site. We used to think that *World of Warcraft* players spent all their time in raids. But this pastry proves that the kitchen is the new Black Temple of the food world. We can't fathom the level of skill one needs to have in order to create such an exquisitely edible masterpiece. The *WoW* cake's detail looks a lot more metalwork than munch-able; it should be attached to the front of a shield, not a countertop.

Game cakes are a relatively new fad, but they're slowly gaining momentum. If you need to inspire yourself, or need a recipe, you can find the biggest wealth of cake-related concoctions at Gamecakes.com and good ol' flickr, where a search for "game cake" will net you a virtual smorgasbord of culinary creativity. - *David Murphy*

CHOICE CAKES

Mike Fahey, creator of Gamecakes.com, shares with us his five favorite gamecakes.



1. THE MARIO BROS. WEDDING CAKE

When I think of gamecakes, this is the image that comes to mind. Two people joined together forever felt that a video game was an important enough aspect of their life that it could symbolize their marriage. (photo by Ben Edwards)

2. NINTENDO DS

Nintendo PR's dream come true, this amazingly detailed replica of a Nintendo DS was perfect down to the tiny charge port on the back and the game on the screen.

3. THE HORDE SHIELD

A birthday cake fit for Thrall himself! This cake came across my desk at a time when the only things I did were write and play *World of Warcraft*. As an undead mage I would have been proud to receive this cake on my birthday.

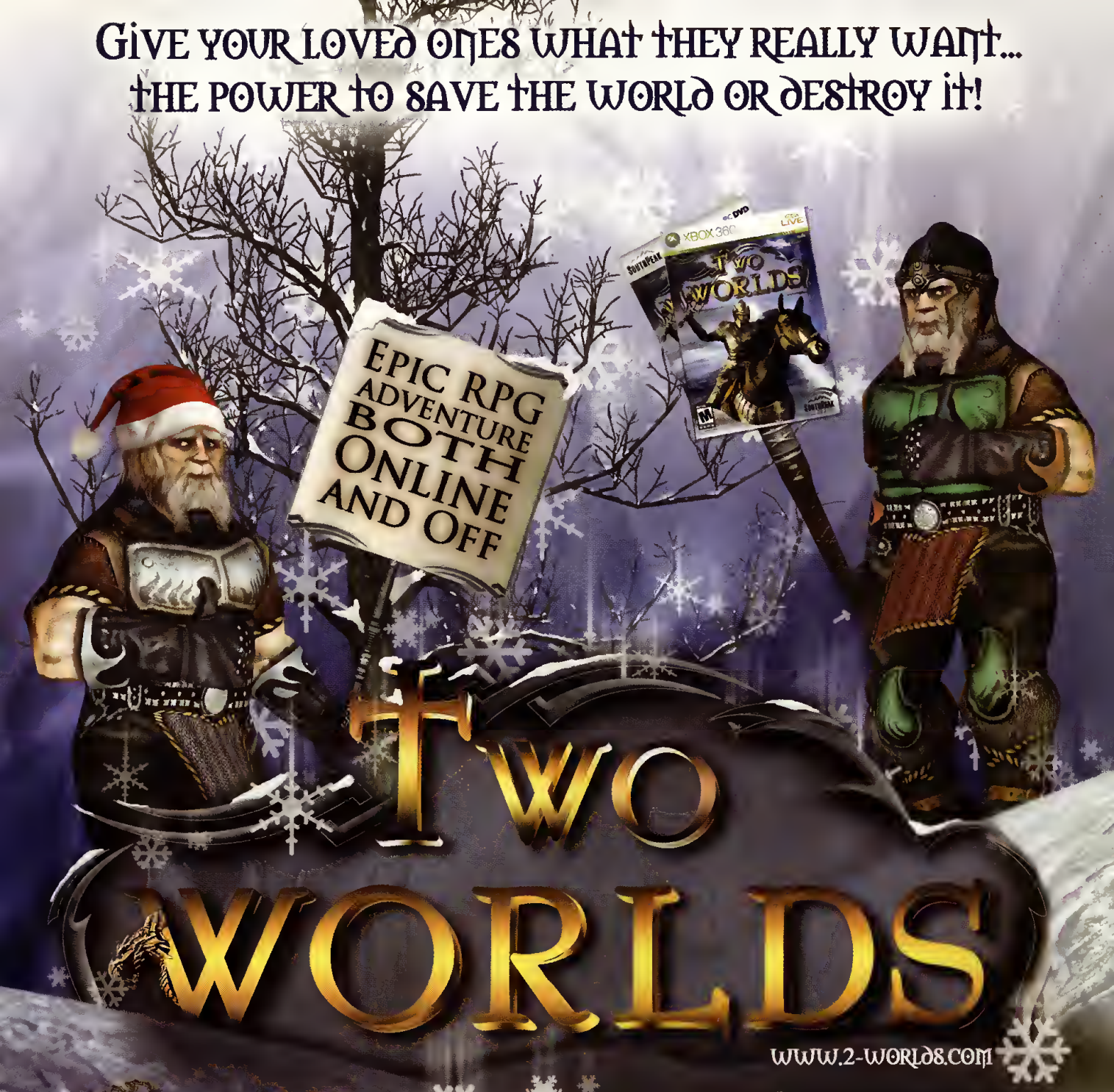
4. *FALLOUT 3* VAULT BOY

This is the first gamecake I got up close and personal with, featured at the Bethesda *Fallout 3* press event this past June.

5. PIXELCAKE LINK

The latest trend is pixelcakes, which is when different-colored cupcakes are used to represent pixels in old school video games. Here, Link is rendered with three different colors of cupcakes.

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CONFESSIONS OF A GAME STORE CLERK

GAMES WE WISH WE DIDN'T LOVE

THE WORST GAMING PR DISASTERS

THE WORST CELEBRITY GAMING VOICEOVERS

- The rudest game cheats
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HOW-TO:
PICK A GAMING TATTOO
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WHERE'S LIMEY?
PCXL's mascot Limey was crushed by Coconut Monkey's fat ass. His last words: "Screw you!"

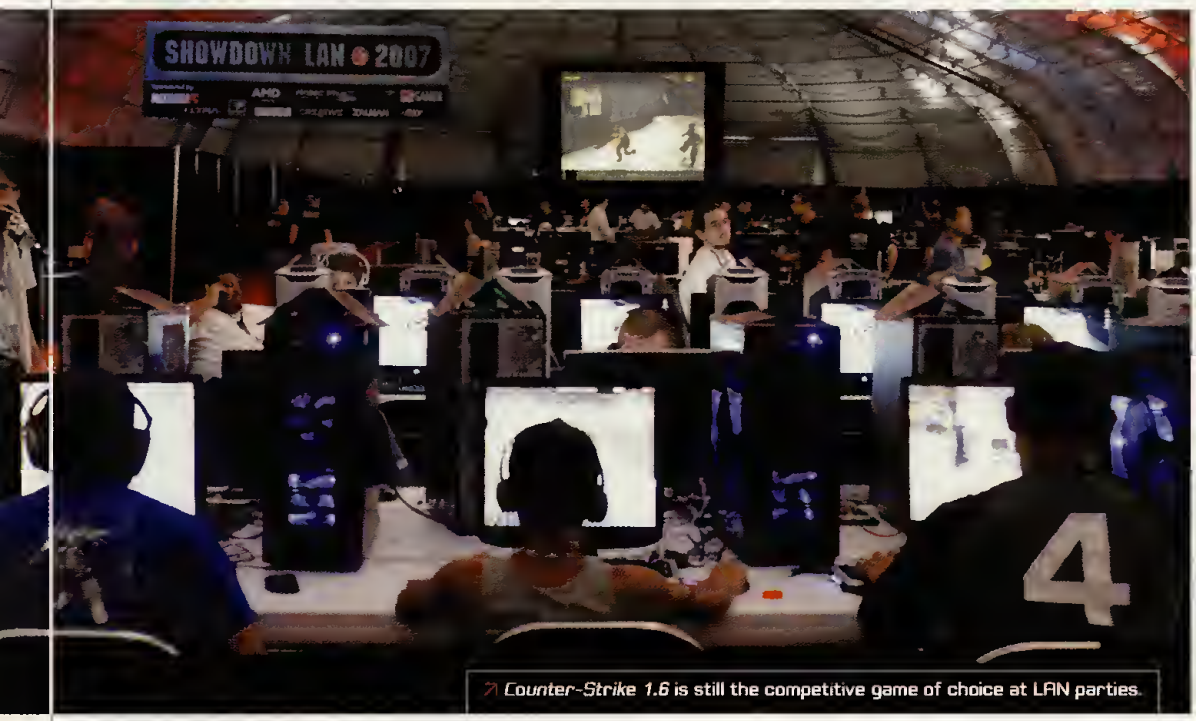
We can only imagine what's on the other leg.

Fighting the good fight, one arm at a time.

If you're completely unabashed about your love for games, and want the world to know it, you might be in the market for a gaming tattoo. Inking a game's logo, character, or scene on your body is nothing new – people have been sporting Pac-Man and Mario on their arms and backs for years. It's only recently, though, that gaming tattoos have hit mainstream appeal, most notably with ex-Microsoft VP Peter Moore's *Halo* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* tattoos (though we're still skeptical about their authenticity). If you know want to jump on the tattoo bandwagon before the fad wears out but can't decide how to do it, here're a couple tattoo ideas that we think would rock but are too gutless to get ourselves:

- A SIEGE TANK FROM *STARCRAFT*
- GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD FROM *MONKEY ISLAND*
- THE CROWBAR FROM *HALF-LIFE*
- THE "NINE IN NAILS" AMMO CRATE FROM *QUAKE*
- A MURLOC PET FROM *WARCRAFT*
- COCONUT MONKEY





↗ *Counter-Strike 1.6* is still the competitive game of choice at LAN parties.

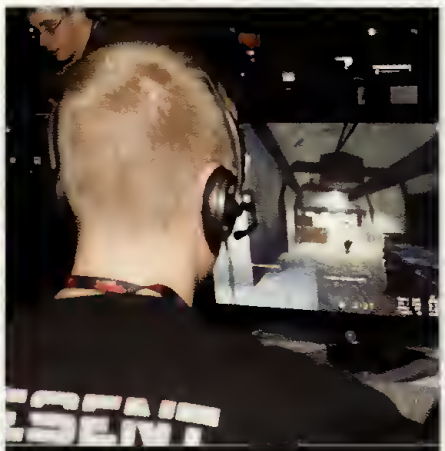
HOW-TO:
RUN A ROCKIN' LAN PARTY

TIPS TO PLANNING A PING-FREE PARTY

The advent of blazing fast broadband internet services may have conquered most latency issues for multiplayer gaming, but even the fastest fiber-optic connection is no substitute for the joy of gaming at a LAN party. But gamers are a lethargic breed, so getting them to haul their computers and monitors across town (or even cross-country) just to game is no easy feat. Organizers looking to host mid-sized LAN parties (20-50 people) should keep the following suggestions in mind if they want to pack their event with more awesome than ass. *(see sidebar)*



/// Who doesn't love Costco pizza and soda? ///



Make sure your attendees bring headphones.

LAN PARTY TIPS



- Don't book hotel ballrooms and city-run convention halls. These venues are typically the most expensive because you're locked into contracts with exclusive food and event service providers. Look into renting school auditoriums or local veteran halls instead.
- Get free swag and games from sponsorships. Hook your attendees up with gift bags provided by sponsors. Companies like Bawls energy drink and nVidia often support LANs by giving out t-shirts and prizes.
- Run contests and casual game tournaments. *Counter-Strike* and *Battlefield* tournaments may be staples of the LAN scene, but the best events have plenty of other fun games for the less hardcore. Musical chairs, Jenga, shuffleboard, and Peggle contests will keep gamers from getting bored.
- Avoid turning the LAN into a circus. Loud music and flashy lights tend to drive attendees nuts, especially if your LAN lasts through the night. Require that all gamers bring headphones too.
- Buy tons of food and drinks. A hungry gamer is a sad gamer. Keep your attendees fed with Pizza and soda throughout the event. Most people don't mind if you need to raise your admission price by a few bucks to cover the cost of food.
- Invite lots of girls. It never hurts to try. Just don't tell them it's a LAN party.

CONFESSIONS OF A WOW PET COLLECTOR

GAME PETS GIVE INTERN ANDY THE LOVE HE CAN'T FIND IN REAL LIFE

Passionate *World of Warcraft* players like me compulsively try to collect every in-game commodity in Azeroth. No matter if the item is a rare armor enhancement or useless gem, I'll spend hours searching and hunting for it to stuff in my backpack, even if I'll never use it. It's this completist mindset that keeps me coming back to this wonderful addiction, even long after I've maxed out my character.

My drive to acquire in-game items is kicked into the highest gear every time I see someone with a new pet. If you're not familiar with the concept, a pet in *World of Warcraft* is a little NPC character that follows you around, acting purely as an ornament or aiding you as a damage dealing buddy (only if you're a hunter or a warlock). For me, there're the cutest creatures that I love to have follow me around, wagging their endearing tails or flapping adorable little wings.



Giant horse beats tiny reindeer any day.



/// I'm a cute turtle. Deal with it. ///

Many pets can be bought from vendors located in all the major cities. But, like a child's first goldfish, these lackluster pets are a dime a dozen. The ones that'll win you Best of Show are rewarded through special quests. More often than not, an in-game holiday celebration will feature a unique quest that'll reward you with a limited edition pet that you can keep forever. It's these highly sought prizes that give me a reason to play – nay, give me a reason to live.

To date, I've collected 29 different pets. That's right; I have more pets crammed in my backpack than there are days in the month of February. Of the many darlings in my digital pen, my current favorite is Egbert. Normally, pets just follow you around and stand by your side. Not Egbert. This beautiful beastie isn't tied down by the restrictive tethers of social order! He frantically runs around like a madman, and gets me all the hot Elven chicks.

If you can't fathom the concept of feeling love for a virtual game character, your soul is emptier than the depths of the Dark Portal. Egbert is my friend, companion, and the best thing to happen to me since I reached level 70. That is, until Blizzard releases the next rare pet item.

- Andy Salisbury

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REAL GUITAR HEROS
Clockwise from bottom: Alex Oliver, Owen Grace, Christian Marenbach, and Ryan Yaunt

STAR POWER

WAIT A MINUTE, THAT'S NOT A BASS GUITAR!

In February, Owen Grace thought he had a great idea. As a *Guitar Hero* fan, he had rocked out numerous times in front of a TV to covers of classic rock songs. He wondered if it would be possible to take those controllers and somehow use them in a real band. After convincing three of his buddies that it could be done (after already booking the then non-existent band's first show, no less), Grace began working on programming a system that would transform the game's plastic controllers into jamming synthesizers. Two months of programming and five practice sessions later, the Guitar Zeros played their first show in San Francisco.

Alex Oliver, the band's bass-controller player, explained to us the tech that powers the band. "The guitars are plugged into a laptop, which runs audio software Owen created using a program called Max/MSP. Each button is mapped to a different synthesized note." And even though the controller only has five neck buttons, Grace has devised a way to expand the range of the instrument. "The start and select buttons are also used in conjunction with the fret buttons to select different synthesis modes, too."

Currently, the band only has seven songs, and is plotting their second show. The members all have regular jobs outside of the band, but plan to keep on playing together as long as its fun. They're a little weary of their act turning into a gimmick, so they will unlikely be transitioning over to the *Rock Band* controllers and drum kit when that game comes out. Oliver is sure of one thing, though. "The keytar is a thing of the past."

GAMING BUZZ BANDS



THE MINIBOSSES

www.minibosses.com

As the most popular game-inspired punk band, this four-piece act from Phoenix has made a name itself by rocking out to NES games' theme songs.



THE ONEUPS

www.theoneups.com

Up-and-coming band The OneUps use add saxophones, violins, and mandolins to the usual repertoire of rock instruments to put you in 8-bit heaven.

READING RAINBOW

GREAT BOOKS YOU CAN TAKE TO THE BATHROOM

Take a break from squinting at the tiny text of articles online and read an actual book. These picks might not raise your IQ, but they'll stimulate your brain more than any game ever will (except *Brain Age*).



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: RISE OF THE HORDE

BY:: Christie Golden
PRICE:: $8 | URL:: www.amazon.com

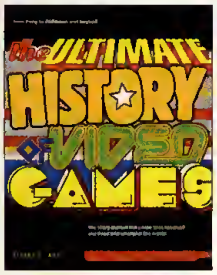
Alliance members need not apply.



HELLGATE: LONDON: EXODUS

BY:: Mel Odom
PRICE:: $8 | URL:: www.amazon.com

"It's like the game... but it's a book!"
- *Greg Vederman*



THE ULTIMATE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

BY:: Steven Kent
PRICE:: $13.50 | URL:: www.amazon.com



PERSUASIVE GAMES: THE EXPRESSIVE POWER OF VIDEOGAMES

BY:: Ian Bogost
PRICE:: $35 | URL:: www.amazon.com



THE BATMAN HANDBOOK

BY:: Scott Beatty
PRICE:: $15 | URL:: www.thinkgeek.com

Luckily, step one isn't getting your parents killed.



WHERE'S MY JETPACK?

BY:: Daniel Wilson
PRICE:: $15 | URL:: www.thinkgeek.com



OPTIMUS RHYME

www.optimusrhyme.com

The AutoBeats of this hip-hop act riff and rhyme with songs about technology, science fiction, and life on planet Earth.

MERC STEALTH
ILLUMINATED GAMING KEYBOARD



CHOKE HOLD PURPLE

WWW.IDEAZON.COM/MERCSTEALTH

DOMINATE

IDEAZON
PRECISION GAMING TOOLS

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GAME TCHOTCHKES

THAT'S A REALLY TOUGH WORD TO SPELL

Every so often, we'll unexpectedly receive a large package in the mail. While we typically receive preview builds of games and art asset discs from publishers, they'll occasionally send us novel promotional items to coincide with the release of their newest game. Sometimes they'll be large posters or t-shirts (size XL, of course), but once in a while, tearing open the box will reveal a real sword or baseball bat (with game logo embossed on it). After oohing and ahhing at the item, the promotional freebie finds a home on our overcrowded wall of swag. We wanted to show you some of the stuff that's showed up at the office, but with one message in mind: we *can't* be bribed. No matter how cool the tchotchke may be, if the game it's promoting is crap, we'll let you know.



STRANGLEHOLD



WORLD IN CONFLICT



EVERQUEST II



CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS



TORTUGA: TWO TREASURES



UPSHIFT STRIKERACER



THE SEED OF CHAOS

MERC STEALTH

ILLUMINATED GAMING KEYBOARD

WWW.IDEAZON.COM/MERCSTEALTH

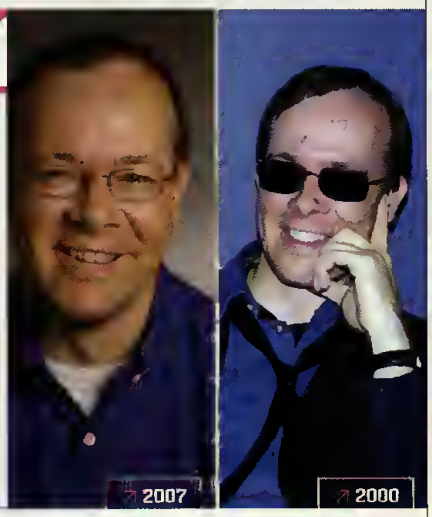
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NO STARS JUST TALENT



Movies have Hollywood stars and blockbuster directors. Music has celebrated legends and American Idol 15-minute famers. Sports is brimming with superstars cashing in on natural (or 'roid-fueled) talent. Even the literati have a billionaire magic-maker in JK Rowling and can irk Ayatollahs like the fatwah-earning Salman Rushdie.

Games? We don't like no stinkin' stars. It's a team effort. Everyone contributes. Create a rock start mentality like the infamous Daikatana ad that espoused "John Romero is going to make you his bitch!" and what happens? The game suffers delay after comical delay, has a staggeringly incomprehensible opening level, and Romero's name is mud.

Trot out the available personalities in the games industry and it's a parade of the "usual suspects." CliffyB – he's young(ish), cool, funny, comfortable with a microphone under his nose and a camera in his face, a shoo-in for photo and interview ops. Relic's Alex Garden fit the same model, but hitched a ride on the Internet Money Truck when THQ bought Relic, his development studio.

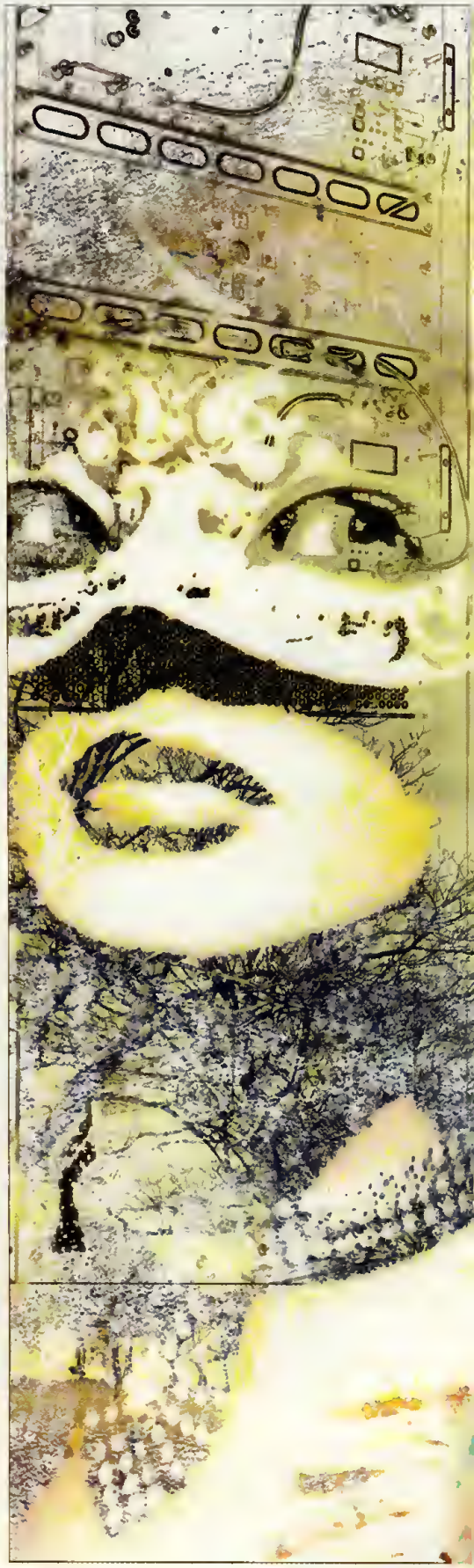
It's easy to reel off a list of personable senior game developers who provide great interviews, and are comfortable as the public face of their franchises – Bill Roper, Warren Spector, etc – but why no out and out stars? In part it's due to teams getting bitter about one person getting all the public credit. You generally don't hear of the assistant best boy grip blogging up a storm about how if it wasn't for his rigging, that Oscar-winning movie would have been a straight-to-DVD disaster. Not so with the blogosphere and forum denizens inhabiting the games space; devs read forums, they get upset, they react and respond. And that can include disgruntled low-rung team members who can take pot shots from under the shade of l33t-name anonymity.

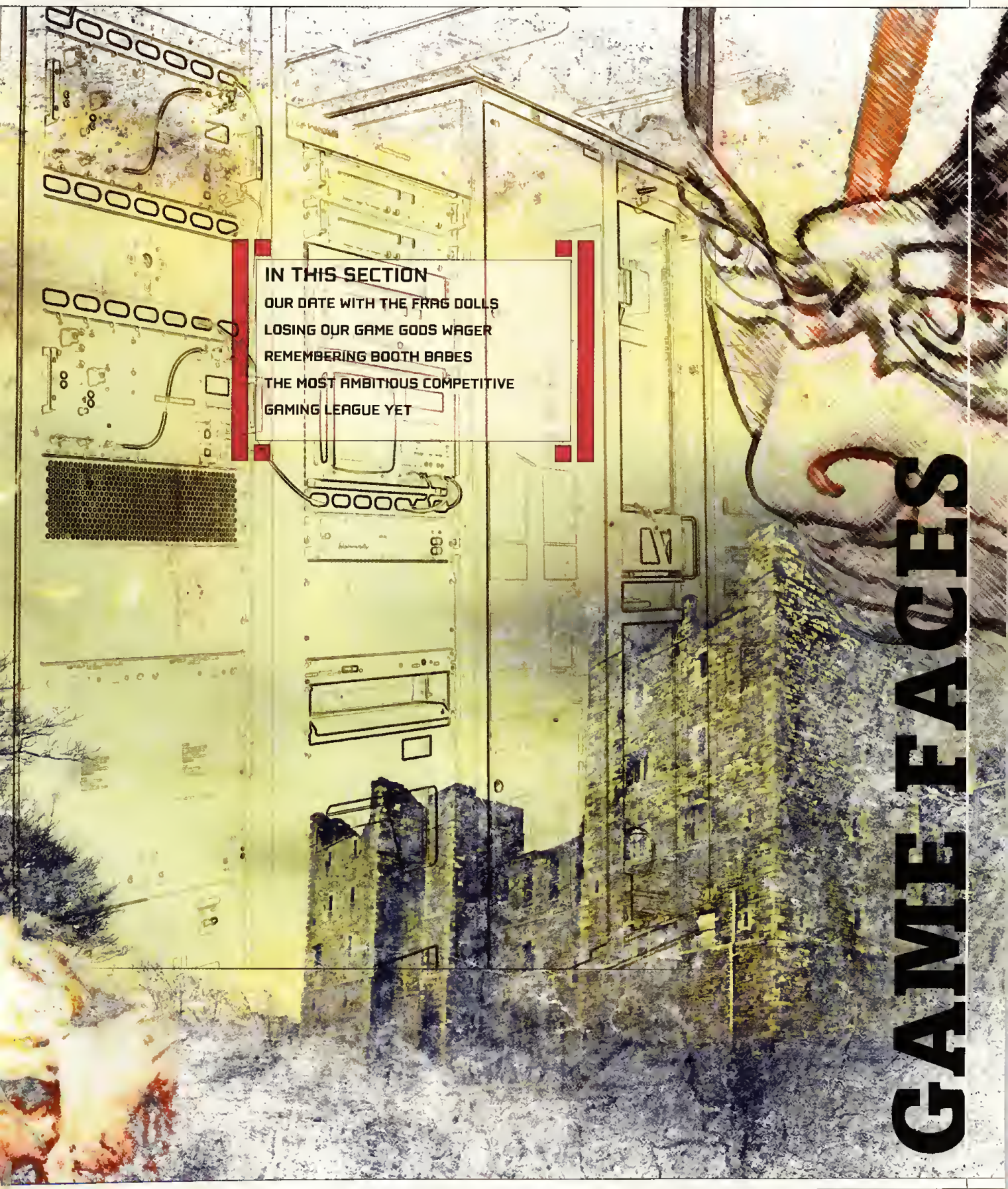
So we make up mini-stars. Stevie Case graced the cover of PCXL back in the day in a Hot for Teacher story that was, well, a great excuse to shoot a hot pictorial and pretend it was games-related! Ah, the good old days. Tomb Raider model du jour? Stick her on the cover. Game maker/developer/dork – leave that to PC Gamer!

Some would argue – probably justifiably – that the staff of PCXL were all stars and no talent. Oh, wait, was that no stars and no talent? I know we heard that from the odd disgruntled publisher, upset at the skewering we gave their recently-released dross. But I'll say this, casting a fond eye back nearly 10 years to the day I jumped from PC Games to work with Mike Salmon on the launch of PCXL, that team had a special something that made them all stars.

Imagine today what we'd do with Frag Dolls, no booth babes at E3 (no E3), and women in high-profile positions across the industry. We'd be shut down after one issue. But it'd be one great issue [which you're holding right now – Ed]!

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PSM [AND FORMER EXECUTIVE EDITOR FOR PCXL]





GAME FACES

IN THIS SECTION

OUR DATE WITH THE FRAG DOLLS
LOSING OUR GAME GODS WAGER
REMEMBERING BOOTH BABES
THE MOST AMBITIOUS COMPETITIVE GAMING LEAGUE YET


FragDolls

MY DATE WITH THE *Frag Dolls*

The Editor-in-Chief of PC Gamer magazine goes 7-on-1 with the sexiest gamers on the planet and learns that it's best to take them seriously…unless, of course, you're looking for a serious beatdown in your favorite shooter.


CALYBER

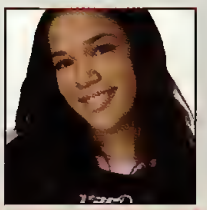

VALKYRIE

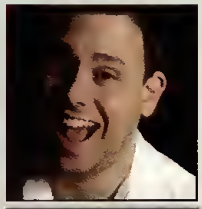

JINX


BROOKELYN


SEPUKKU


RHOULETTE


PSYCHE


GREG

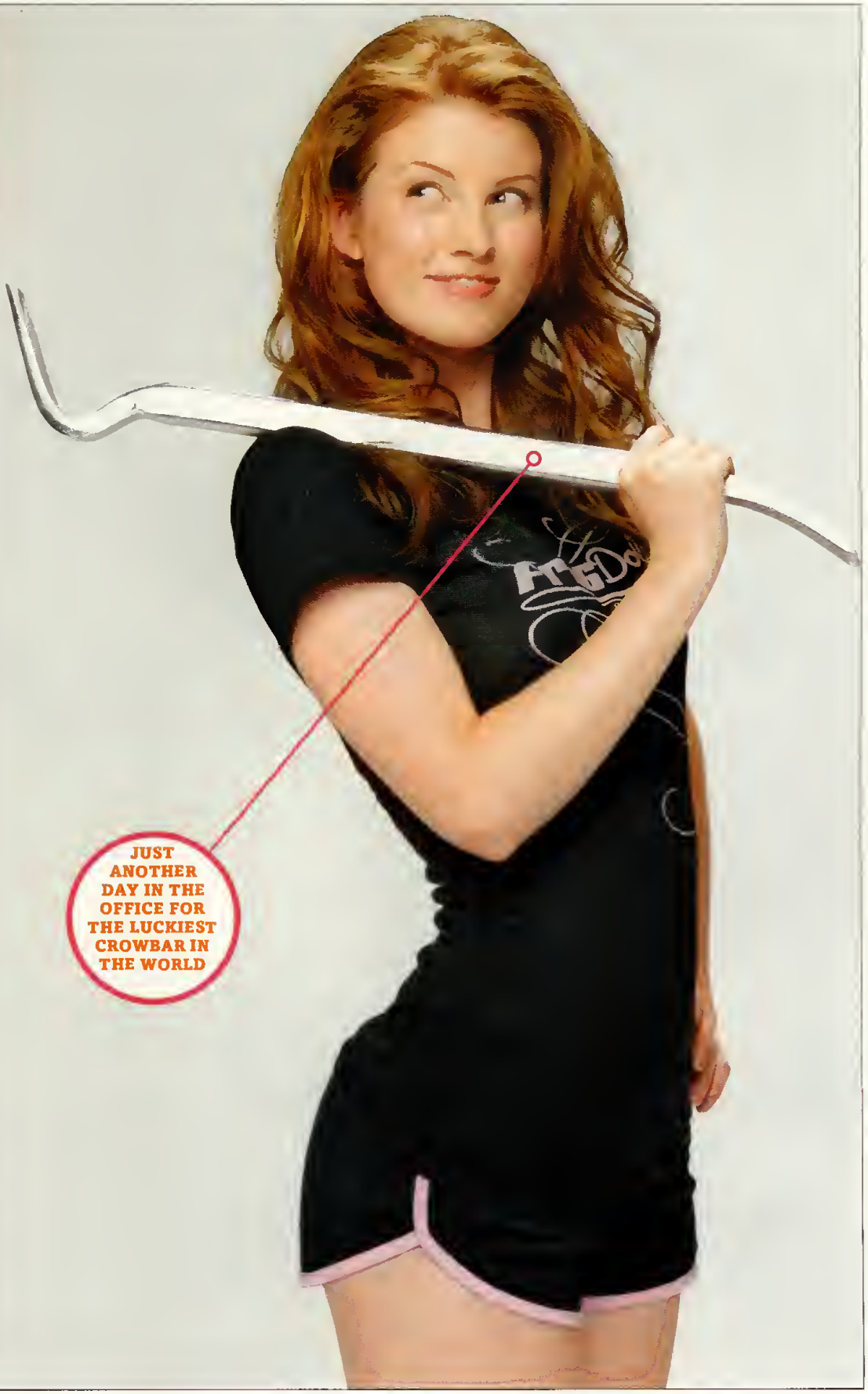
PCXL: Who the hell are the Frag Dolls and why should PCXL readers care?
VALKYRIE: The media-trained response: The Frag Dolls are a team of competitive female gamers put together to market and promote Ubisoft products through competition. The Valkyrie Answer: Frag Dolls are a group of kick-ass gamer women brought together to dominate every male gamer and make him go run crying to his mommy. You should care because I said so.

CALYBER: And because we're awesome. Awesomeness is important these

MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

JINX

REAL NAME: Ashley
I LOOK LIKE: The last thing you see before you respawn
XBOX LIVE GAMERTAG: jinx FD
HEIGHT: 5'5" (Almost!)
EYES: Hazel
HAIR: Iangish, carmelish, straightish
LOCATION: Berkeley, CA
FAVORITE GENRES: Platformer, Adventure, FPS
FAVORITE GAMES: Final Fantasy X, Morrawind, Homeworld, Psychonauts, Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, Rainbow Six Vegas
FAVORITE SNACK: Ben & Jerry's Oatmeal Cookie Chunk ice cream
FAVORITE MUSIC: Tori Amos, Delerium, Frou Frou, Tool, Aria, E.S. Posthumus, Massive Attack, NIN, Fiona Apple, The Killers, Franz Ferdinand, Gorillaz, Garbage, Thievery Corparation, Jem, KT Tunstall, REM, Pearl Jam, Nirvana, No Doubt, Gwen Stefani, Eskimo Joe, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, The Cat Empire, Powderfinger
FAVORITE BOOKS: Kushiel's Legacy trilogy, Tir Alloin trilogy and Black Jewels trilogy, Sevenwaters trilogy, Harry Potter series, Ender's Game, The Diamond Age, Calvin and Hobbes, His Dark Materials trilogy, Memoirs of a Geisha, How to Make Love Like a Porn Star, Anything Discworld
FAVORITE MOVIES Spaceballs, The Princess Bride, Galaxy Quest, Shrek, Finding Nemo, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, The Others, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Hero, Serenity, Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away, Howl's Moving Castle, My Neighbor Totoro, Dangerous Beauty





days.

PSYCHE: Come on! Who wouldn't want to know about a group of butt-kicking hard-core female gamers who not only play online daily, but also compete in several different types of tournaments, as well as make grown men cry after owning them?

BROOKELYN: You should care because I worked my ass off to be where I am today. It's hard to turn one's love for gaming into a competitive career. By having supporters out there makes it that much easier for the next person to succeed in the industry as a professional gamer.

SEPPUKU: Don't you want to know which of us are single?

PCXL: Good heavens, no. Then I'd know which ones *aren't* single, and that would ruin all the fun! But come on, guys, seriously—this a big joke, right? You aren't *actually* into playing videogames, are you?

CALYBER: I've been playin' since *Sesame Street* for the NES. I grew up on *Quake* and moved to the Xbox about four years ago. I've competed at WSVG, MLG, CPL, Game Riot Tour, and several other gaming competitions across the country.

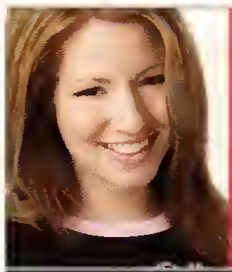
VALKYRIE: I don't know anybody that plays games as much as I do, especially since it's my job now and I don't have to be employed outside of gaming. I am literally gaming or doing something related to gaming every waking moment and truly have no life outside of it.

BROOKELYN: The truth is that it's my lifestyle. Everything I do in life revolves around gaming.

SEPPUKU: I've been training my gaming fingers since I was five playing on the Intellivision II and the Amiga 2000 computer, which a lot of gamers are too young to even remember. I played *Bubble Bobble* with my toes and used to force my parents to witness every game I beat while I was growing up. So yes, I really do play video games.

RHOULETTE: Umm, yeah, it's totally a joke...everyone knows that uteruses drain all thumb strength thereby making gaming impossible. Seriously, though, I've never understood why people are surprised to learn that women can love video games.

JINX: I started playing games when I was



MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

CALYBER

REAL NAME: Alyson
I LOOX LIKE: A million microsoft points (how many dollars is that?)
XBOX LIVE GAMERTAG: Colyber FD
HEIGHT: 5' 2 1/2"
EYES: Green/Blue/Gray - depending how close you are to my face
HAIR: Blonde
LOCATION: Beaverton, OR
FAVORITE GENRES: FPS, RPG, and Fighting
FAVORITE GAMES: Halo, Quake 3, Rainbow Six: Vegas, GRAW 2, Oblivion, Fable, Super Turbo Puzzle Fighter 2, DOA4 and Bomberman
FAVORITE SNACK: Pringles
FAVORITE MUSIC: Indie Rock. I love Beck, Neutral Milk Hotel, Modest Mouse, Elliott Smith, Bright Eyes, Lucero, The Decemberists, Josh Ritter, Pinback, Grandaddy and Iron and Wine.
FAVORITE BOOKS: Atlas Shrugged, Ender's Game, Catch22 and Real Ultimate Power: The Official Ninja Book
FAVORITE MOVIES: Empire of the Sun, Garden State, Brick

> "I've been training my gaming fingers since I was five playing on the Intellivision II and the Amiga 2000 computer... I played *Bubble Bobble* with my toes and used to force my parents to witness every game I beat while I was growing up. So yes, I really do play video games."
>
> – *Seppuku*

little. They're fun. I have no reason not to play them.

PSYCHE: We are no joke. Sometimes it's hard for people (especially guys) to believe that we are into video games but it's very true.

PCXL: Have you ever won tournaments against…you know, dudes?

CALYBER: Doodz Schmoodz. In November of 2006 we won first place in *Rainbow Six Vegas* on the Xbox 360 at CPL, Cyberathlete Professional League.

PCXL: No way! Alright, so quick: Tell me what the best weapon attachment upgrade for an AK37 in *Rainbow Six Vegas* is.

CALYBER: The ACOG scope. Duh!

PCXL: Oooh, so sorry, Calyber. That is incorrect. Anyone else want to take a shot?

JINX: Trick question! It's an AK47 not 37, and you shouldn't be playing with that anyway. I play with the MP9 with the reflex scope, but that's an SMG-class weapon.

VALKYRIE: Yeah, you shouldn't be using the AK47 because there are far better assault rifles in the game. If you still insist on using it (I think you're crazy), the attachment would be based on what type of player you are—ACOG if you're a close or mid-range player, 6X scope if you tend to shoot long-range.

PCXL: OK, OK, so you guys obviously play games (except for Calyber—JK!), but as Ubisoft employees, you can only play Ubi's games publicly, right?

RHOULETTE: We play Ubisoft's games the most, which is fine with us because Ubi looked specifically for Ubisoft fangirls when hiring Frag Dolls. But we play plenty of non-Ubisoft games, too. We're gamers, first and foremost, and we love all sorts of games. Ubisoft knows this and loves this about us.

CALYBER: That's right—Ubisoft gives us the freedom to play other publisher's games because they recognize we are gamers who like to, you know, play fun games. Once a month, we have Frag Doll Fridays, a gaming night where we take on Xbox Live gamers in Ubi games as well as non-Ubi games. So, I actually get paid to keep up on my *Gears of War* and *Halo* skills!

BROOKELYN: My life is being consumed by WoW at this very moment.

PSYCHE: Ubisoft games are my favorite, but I also enjoy playing other types of games like *Guitar Hero*, *Shadowrun*, and *Gears of War*. Ubisoft understands that the Frag Dolls are diverse gamers. Read our blogs to find out for yourself!

PCXL: How did a group of beautiful women such as yourselves decide that playing games was your calling? You all responded to Craigslist ads, right? (I've been told that job listings aren't all that Craigslist has to offer, and if you know what I'm talking about, then shame on you.)

CALYBER: I don't know what you're talking about. (OK, maybe a little bit. Ha!) I am one of the newer members on the team. Psyche and I were drafted through a casting call filmed by GameTrailers.com a little over a year ago. Prior to being a Frag Doll, I had very limited time and money to invest in my gaming interests, but now Ubisoft supports me in my gaming aspirations and makes it possible for me to compete and travel to events that I wouldn't have access to otherwise.

PSYCHE: Before I was a Frag Doll, I was just a full-time student at college who stayed up late and played videogames all night as a member of the PMS clan. Right now I'm still attending college to attain my BA in Psychology (hence the name Psyche).

VALKYRIE: I saw the posting on another female gaming site, as I'm the webmaster for my other clan and was always searching for content. I immediately used my human resources background and degree and threw together a gaming resume. Ubisoft called me the next day! (And by the way, shame on me.)

BROOKE: When Valkyrie told me about the Craigslist posting it was like a light shined down on my head. I knew I needed to try out! This way, I could cover up my addiction with a pretty little word called "JOB"! Before I came onboard, I was lead-



MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

SEPPUKU

REAL NAME: Emily
I LOOK LIKE: Some Asian girl you know
XBOX LIVE GAMERTAG: seppuku fd
HEIGHT: 5'8"
EYES: Brown
HAIR: Black (surprisingly)
LOCATION: Nor Cal
FAVORITE GENRES: FPS, Action/Adventure, Puzzle
FAVORITE GAMES: Halo, Halo 2, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Gears of War, WOW, Warcraft III, Resident Evil 4, God of War 1&2, FFVII, FFIX, Pikmin 2, Raymon Roving Rabbids, Winning Eleven 6, Top Spin, Black & White, the Sims series, New Super Mario Bros, Rainbow Six: Vegas. As far old school - 007, Mario Kart 64, Mario Tennis, Super Bombermon, Super Mario World, Super Mario Bros 2 and 3, Bubble Bobble, Dr. Mario, Tetris Attack, Moppy, Burgertime
FAVORITE SNACK: Popsicles, ice cream, candy, any Asian snacks
FAVORITE MUSIC: Weezer, Radiohead, Smashing Pumpkins, Coldplay, The Strokes, No Doubt, Rilo Kiley, Beastie Boys, Green Day, oldies from the '50s
FAVORITE MOVIES: Star Wars, Indiana Janes, Back to the Future trilogies, Goonies, Stand By Me, Clueless, Mean Girls, OfficeSpace, Sneakers, Election, Roman Holiday, Singing in the Rain
FAVORITE BOOKS: Kitchen God's Wife, Bonesetter's Daughter (both Amy Tan), Different Seasons (Stephen King), Da Vinci Code



MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

PSYCHE

REAL NAME: Renelly
I LOOK LIKE: Michelle Rodruguez or Rosario Dowson
XBOX LIVE GAMERTAG: Psyche FD
HEIGHT: 5'5"
EYES: Brown
HAIR: Black
LOCATION: New York
FAVORITE GENRE: FPS
FAVORITE GAMES: Legend of Zeldo orcorino of time, Tetris, Ghost Recon, Socom, Super Smash brothers, Tomb Raider
FAVORITE SNACK: Potato chips!
FAVORITE MUSIC: What don't I like?
FAVORITE MOVIES: Disney's Mulan and Better off Dead (mad BDs)
FAVORITE TV SHOWS: Family Guy
FAVORITE BOOKS: Music books and learning about music
FAVORITE QUOTE: "Owned!"



MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

BROOKELYN

REAL NAME: Brooke
I LOOK LIKE: Angelina Jolie, Catherine Zeta Jones

XBOX LIVE GAMERTAG: Brooketyn FD
HEIGHT: 5'10"
EYES: Brown
HAIR: Dark Brown
LOCATION: Seattle
FAVORITE GENRE: FPS
FAVORITE GAMES: Rainbow Six 3, Splinter Cell, Ghost Recon (all)
FAVORITE SNACKS: Beef jerky, sour candy
FAVORITE MUSIC: Outkast, Billy Joel, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder
FAVORITE BOOKS: Dream Catcher, Cosmo :)
FAVORITE MOVIE: Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom
FAVORITE QUOTE: "Dude, you just got killed by a girl!"

AIRSOFT FTW
Brooke is holding Norm's personal M4A1 Carbine, which he'll never wash again.

MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

RHOULETTE

REAL NAME: Morgan
I LOOK LIKE: very few other people. The comparison I hear most is Botticelli's Venus.
XBOX LIVE GAMER-TAG: Rhoulette FD
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
EYES: Hazel: Green in the light, brown in the dark
HAIR: Red and curly
LOCATION: Oakland, CA
HOMETOWN: San Diego, CA
FAVORITE GENRES: MMORPG, RPG, FPS, Adventure, Puzzle, and Sandbox
FAVORITE GAMES: Okami, Guitar Hero, World of Warcraft, Splinter Cell, Knights Of The Old Republic, Rainbow Six Vegas, Beyond Good and Evil, Final Fantasy VII, Baldur's Gate II, and Shadowbane.
FAVORITE SNACK: CHEESE!
FAVORITE MUSIC: Air, Lamb, Rage Against the Machine, NIN, Tori Amos, Depeche Mode, Nikka Costa, Chapin, Regina Spektor, Outkast, Muddy Waters, Led Zeppelin, Nina Simone, Beatles, Deva, Sigur Ros, Gwen Stefani, Gogol Bordello, and all FUNK
FAVORITE MOVIES: The Professional, all three Lord of the Rings extended editions, Legend, Princess Bride, Sneakers, Intolerable Cruelty, Children of Men, Dark Crystal, Anchorman, Willow, Ninja Scroll, Ghost in the Shell
FAVORITE BOOKS: Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter series, Song of Ice and Fire series, Wheel of Time series, Ender's Game, Ender's Shadow, His Dark Materials, Atlas Shrugged, Chronicles of Narnia, Left Hand of Darkness, Dune, Brief History of Time
FAVORITE QUOTE: "Go for the eyes, Boo! Go for the eyes!"



OVER-HEARD
"I recognize that sword! They sold that exact model at the sword shop I used to work at!" - Jinx

> From my experience, the girl-gamer stereotype is that we're all 300 pounds, really ugly, and we never leave the house. Apparently that's the only rationale guys can come up with to explain how we own them in their favorite FPS games. I don't care whether "girl" is placed in front of my "gamer" title; I'm just here to shoot stuff."
>
> – *Calyber*

ing the Rainbow Six Division in my PMS (Pandora's Mighty soldiers) Clan.

SEPPUKU: I never had any intention of becoming a pro gamer, but I knew I loved video games. There was a time I thought I'd eventually grow out of playing games, but surprisingly, I didn't! I went to college, got my degrees, and I knew that I wanted to be in the gaming industry. Badly.

RHOULETTE: I was hired by Ubisoft as a community manager before the Frag Dolls project was even a glimmer in Ubisoft's marketing eye. My anecdotes of playing *Ghost Recon* online served as the inspiration for the origianl FD team, which I helped recruit. I didn't ever make the decision to play games for a living; I just knew that I loved the immersive fantasy of games, the competitive elements of FPS play, and the social dynamics of gaming communities.

JINX: I had a videogame addiction long before I became a Frag Doll. I ran some fansites and wrote as an in-game journalist for an MMO called *Shadowbane*. A friend on the *Shadowbane* dev team heard about the call for Frag Dolls and urged me to apply. I'm glad I did!

PCXL: OK, shifting gears. Imagine it's Friday night and we're out on a date (and that I'm rich and handsome). Are we bar hopping downtown or bunny hopping our way through an FPS?

CALYBER: I'd like to see your hands work the controller before we head out on a real date. If you can't get consistent TSKs (Three Shot Kills) in *Halo*, it's going to be a lonely Friday night for you.

PCXL: Ouch!

BROOKELYN: Just because I'm a gamer doesn't make me dumb... I would let you take me shopping then we could go back to your place to game. (Of course, if you're rich you'd have the better setup.)

JINX: I'm not really a fan of bar hopping. If you're smart you'll treat me to yummy food and try to impress me with your gaming setup.

PCXL: Important question time: Do you find that having breasts gets in the way of guy gamers taking you seriously, or is it typically your butt that gets in the way?

SEPPUKU: Neither. I could probably pass for a boy if I wanted.

PCXL: Oh, please—not with a pretty face like yours you couldn't. What about the rest of you?

RHOULETTE: If I ever encounter a guy gamer who doesn't take my gaming skills seriously, it only takes about 30 seconds of playing against him to shatter his misconceptions. Breasts and butt only come into play as an advantageous distraction.

CALYBER: Wow, are those the only two parts of female anatomy that guys pay attention to? It's usually my thumbs and mouse-clicking finger that get in the way… of men having the ability to talk without feeling ashamed by the ass-pounding I just handed down to them!

VALKYRIE: Definitely, my ass gets in the way of many things, but it has nothing to do with me being taken seriously in a game after I finishing owning YOUR ass.

PCXL: Is it getting hot in here?

BROOKELYN: My breasts get in the way regardless of what I do in life. I'm used to it.

PCXL: I am *so* not used to it.

PSYCHE: My physical assets don't get in the way—especially when I game online and people can't see me. I think once guys hear and see what I'm all about, they get how serious I am.

JINX: Neither my breasts nor my butt get in the way, beyond providing extra couch padding. It's pretty fun when guys think I'm at a disadvantage, though. It doesn't take them long to learn better.

PCXL: This time I really do have a serious question: Shouldn't we all just be "gamers"? How do you feel about playing into the "girl gamer" stereotype?

RHOULETTE: I don't know what "girl gamer" stereotype you're referring to. The stereotype I'm most familiar with is the rationalization created by boys who don't like losing to girls and therefore make themselves feel better by declaring that the only girls who play games must be antisocial, ugly, and overweight. We certainly don't play into that stereotype.

VALKYRIE: Trick question…but yes, we are all gamers. Female gamers are a minority right now, though, and therefore I exploit the fact that I am a female in order to bring more girl gamers [into the fold]. I also admit that, due to the stereotypes that still exist, I let guys who have been rude know that they've just gotten their asses kicked by a girl. But otherwise, I just want to play my games in peace and harmony with my friends.

PSYCHE: I've been playing online videogames for about three years now, and I've noticed a change in the ideal of the girl gamer. Before, girl gamers were almost unheard of, but then the Frag Dolls (as well as other female teams) came along and helped change that. People are beginning to see us as gamers who just happen to be girls.

CALYBER: From my experience, the girl-gamer stereotype is that we're all 300 pounds, really ugly, and we never leave the house. Apparently that's the only rationale guys can come up with to explain how we own them in their favorite FPS games. I don't care whether "girl" is placed in front of my "gamer" title; I'm just here to shoot stuff.



MEET THE FRAG DOLLS!

VALKYRIE

REAL NAME: Amy
I LOOK LIKE: Trick question so I'll play safe and say any other normal blonde.
XBOX LIVE GAMERTAG: Valkyrie FD
HEIGHT: 5'4
EYES: Hazel
HAIR: Blonde
LOCATION: San Antonio TX
FAVORITE GENRES: FPS, Survial/Horror, RPG/MMO, Simulation
FAVORITE GAMES: Beyond Good & Evil, Halo 1, Half Life, Rainbow Six
FAVORITE SNACK: Anything Salty
FAVORITE MUSIC: Everything and anything, particularly classic rock and classical.
FAVORITE MOVIES: City of the Lost Children, Welcome to the Dollhouse, Clerks, The Goonies, The Breakfast Club, Pride & Prejudice
FAVORITE BOOKS: The Witching Hour (series), The Wheel of Time(series), Clan of the Cave Bears (series), The DaVinci Code
FAVORITE QUOTE: "Double Kill, Triple Kill, KILLTACULAR!"

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We were disappointed to discover that the Frag Dolls don't actually train in their underwear.

PCXL: Haha! That's awesome, Calyber. And the rest of you?

BROOKELYN: It's bittersweet for me. On one hand, it's my edge. I know that me being a girl is what got me noticed in the industry and allowed me to have my dream job. But on the other hand, now that I've gotten to where I want to be and established myself as a legitimate gamer, I want to use my status as a Frag Doll to let people know that gaming isn't about being male or female! Don't get me wrong, I'm all about being an advocate for women gamers (as far as getting the message across they can be great at games too), but no one should be judged based on gender. Like you said: Let's just all be gamers.

JINX: How do male nurses feel about playing into the "male nurse" stereotype? As long as guys think it's unusual for girls to play games, there will be "girl gamers." Really, that additional label doesn't diminish (or advance) women as gamers. It's just an identifier that we're not what people expect to find.

SEPPUKU: I agree, we should all just be "gamers," and hopefully we will be someday. But for now, I guess the "girl gamer" thing is still very new to a lot of people. I feel like it's become less and less rare to find girl gamers, but even I stereotype girl gamers sometimes! You can't help it when you grow up in a generation of male-dominated gamers. I remember when I saw Brookelyn walk into the Ubisoft building for our first in-person Frag Doll interview. I thought, "There is no way this girl is trying out to be a Frag Doll; she looks more like a model than a gamer." Lo and behold, she's one of our top *Rainbow Six* players.

PCXL: Well, there you have it: Never judge a book by its cover…unless you want to get schooled in *Rainbow Six* by that cover. Now here's an age-old question that I'm sure you guys can help my readers with: How can guys get their girlfriends interested in playing games?

JINX: First, ask yourself if you really want your girlfriend hooked on games. You know your PC? Accept that she's going to be using it to play Far Cry 2 all the time. Your Xbox 360? All your frags are belong to her. Your Wii? Don't get me started. If losing your gaming equipment doesn't scare you off, start with some accessible games that won't frustrate her or put her off. Play with her, not against her. Let her killer instincts come out on their own.

RHOULETTE: There are a few basic traits to look for when identifying a good "gateway" game: It's got to be easy to learn, difficult to master, and you should

"It took me watching my ex-boyfriend play countless hours of *Ghost Recon* for me to get interested. I wanted to know what made the game so addicting."

– *Brookelyn*

be able put it down whenever you need to. Puzzle games and platformers are great for this. Guys: Have your girlfriends sit down and try Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade games. They're fun, pretty, easy to learn, can be played in short (or long) bursts, and they'll help her get used to wielding a controller.

VALKYRIE: Actually, I wrote a blog about that topic in April, but it is too long to include here. It's called "How to Get Your Girl into Gaming!". To find it, go to www.fragdolls.com, click on Valkyrie, click "view more" on any blog, and then view my April '07 blogs. It'll be right on top.

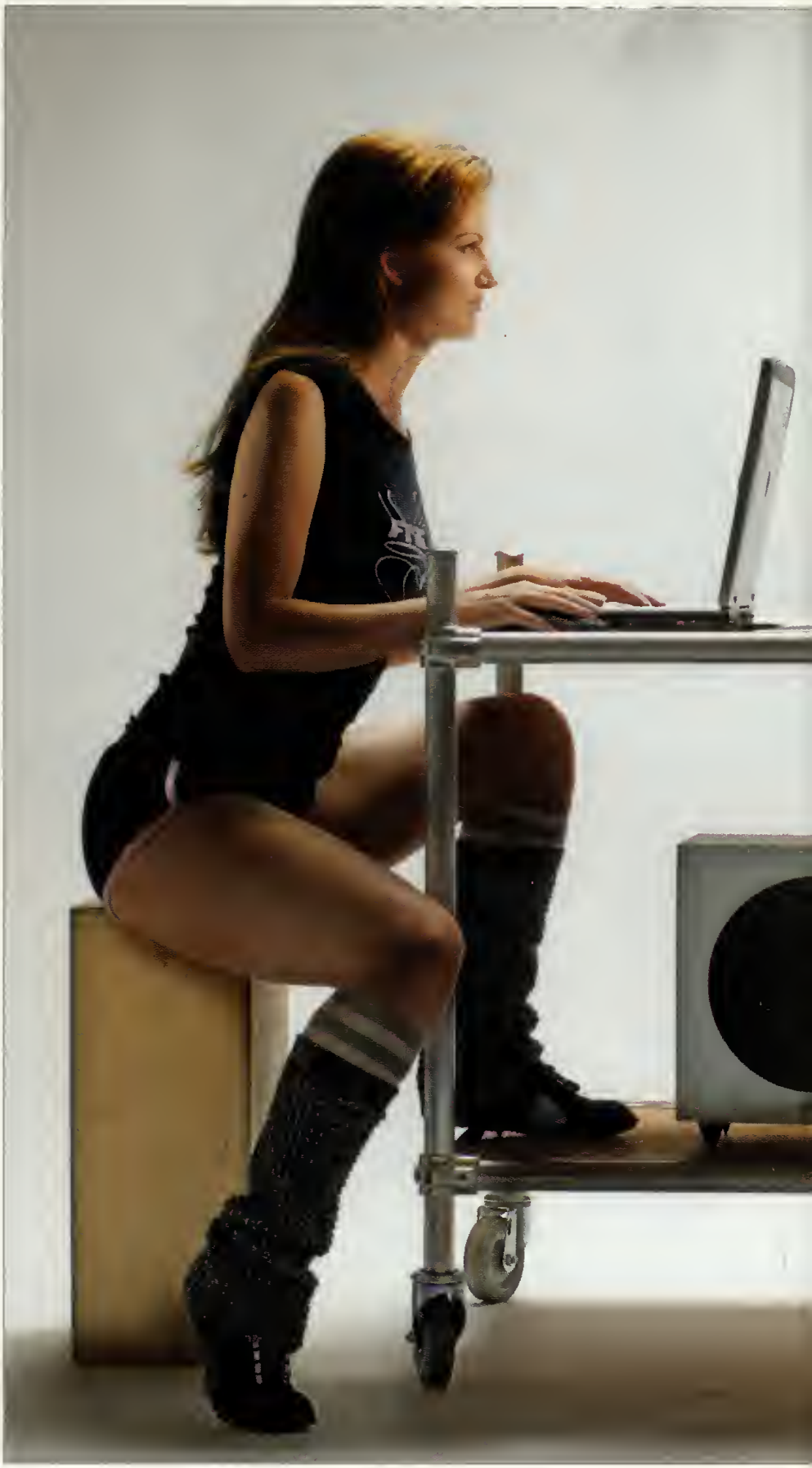
BROOKELYN: It took me watching my ex-boyfriend play countless hours of *Ghost Recon* for me to get interested. I wanted to know what made the game so addicting. So, one day when he left for work, I loaded the game up. To my surprise, I was a natural!

SEPPUKU: Co-op games! If your girl loves you, then she'll love spending time with you—even in a game. I enjoy co-op games because they require teamwork and communication, and when you pass a difficult level, it's a bonding experience. Remember—not all co-op games are shooters. Try *LoTR: Return to the King*—a *Gauntlet*-style hack-and-slash adventure game or *Lego Star Wars*, a great little platformer. In addition to these, there are sports games, puzzle games, even card games like *UNO*. I really believe that there's a game for every girl—you just have to find the one that fits suits her style.

PSYCHE: I recommend party games that are easy to pick up and play. Once your girlfriend is mildly attached to those types of games, then offer her something [more advanced], like your favorite shooter. As she gets the hang of it, compliment her on her awesome skills and soon enough she'll be hooked!

PCXL: Alright, back to the silly stuff. Share some bad pickup lines you've heard at gaming events.

CALYBER: "You can play with my joystick anytime." Or, "I lost my phone number, can





I have yours?"
VALKYRIE: "Someone stole the stars from the sky and put them into your eyes."
BROOKELYN: "You make my software turn to hardware!"
SEPPUKU: Recently, this one kid who looked no more than 16 asked me out, and when I told him I was probably 10 years older than him, he just said "That's cool; I like older women."

PCXL: Holy crap! Those are positively horrendous. (But, uh, hey, ever heard any that actually worked?)
BROOKELYN: "Did your father have sex with a carrot? 'Cause you've got nice eyes." Ookay, so it didn't work but I laughed a lot.
RHOULETTE: "Come over to my place, I'm running a booty, I mean, boot camp."

PCXL: Girlfriend, I'm not even sure what that what means, but it's got a "booty" joke in it and you say that it worked, so I'm committing it to memory. Jinx? Psyche? What about you?
JINX: A really charming guy offered to open a bottle of water I was having trouble with. Classic damsel-in-distress hero right there. I was hooked! Maybe that's not a line, but it's the closest I've gotten.
PSYCHE: "Want to play some games?" That one works every time.

PCXL: Nice! Ever scared away a guy by telling him what you do for a living?
CALYBER: It never scares them away.
VALKYRIE: Yeah, it usually gets them more interested, but I have been known to scare off guys while playing them.
BROOKELYN: Every guy thinks it's awesome! Sometimes, I find myself lying about what I do just so I don't get their attention.
SEPPUKU: I get a mixed response depending on the situation. If I'm telling it to a bunch of gamers, then the response is often comparable to a kid's reaction if you were to, say, tell him that you get paid to be a candy taster. But if I'm about to sit down and play *Halo 2* and I tell the guy that I'm up against that I get paid to play video games, there's usually an "Oh SH*T!" comment right before we start playing.

PCXL: Here's my final test to see if you guys are REAL gamers: If you had to choose between winning a free lifetime supply shoes or a free lifetime supply of games, which would you choose? (Remember: god is watching, so be honest.)

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"If I ever encounter a guy gamer who doesn't take my gaming skills seriously, it only takes about 30 seconds of playing against him to shatter his misconceptions."
– Roulette

CALYBER: Dear God, Please send me a lifetime supply of video games. Shoes are boring. Love, Calyber.
VALKYRIE: In all honesty, I have no shoe or other material fetish other then games and tech toys. I spend thousands of dollars on games because I'm a true collector, so GAMES! (You might have gotten me with wine!)
BROOKELYN: Considering I work for Ubisoft, it's been years since I've actually paid for a game. This is why I'm choosing my second love, shoes! Plus, they cost a hell of a lot more then games.

PCXL: I so knew you were going to pick shoes, Brookeyln. At least you're honest! And the rest of you?
SEPPUKU: If you said clothes, I would have easily picked clothes. But luckily I'm not addicted to shoes, so my answer is a lifetime supply of games. And once I was done with the free games, I would sell them back and use the money to buy more clothes.
RHOULETTE: Yeah, my heart might split in two if I actually had to make that choice.

PCXL: Haha...
JINX: If I could get any game I wanted for free forever, that'd be my choice. The Frag Dolls are sponsored by Puma, so I have a bunch of free sneakers from them already!
PSYCHE: I'm going to be 100% honest with you. I would choose VIDEO GAMES. Shoes last for, like, a day, but a video game? It lasts forever!!!

For more information about the Frag Dolls, visit them on the Web at: http://fragdolls.com/us/





GAME GODS GRADED

ONE OUT OF FOUR ISN'T BAD

Back in the November 2000 issue, PC Gamer magazine proudly presented its picks for the next generation of Game Gods. These were the smart young game developers and designers that would lead the gaming industry into a glorious new era in the 21st century. Well, turns out our crystal balls were a little defective, and not everything turned out the way we thought it would. Here's a look at where these legends in the making are now, seven years later...



/// Stevie Case = old and busted. *Assassin's Creed's* Jade Raymond = the new hotness. ///

AMERICAN MCGEE

Putting your name in front of a game's title is a bold move, but not doing so when you have such a wicked name would be a terrible waste. *American McGee's Alice* was the high point of the former id Software level designer's career, as his recent *Bad Day L.A.* didn't fare so well in reviews. At least the guy's living the dream, focusing his eccentric talents on *Grimm*, another fairy tale-themed adventure series.

Game God Grade: C+

STEVIE CASE

After Daikatana bombed in sales and was universally panned by critics, this onetime *Quake* champion and her Ion Storm crew formed Monkeystone Games – a publisher of Pocket PC software. Today, Case has moved on from the games business.

Game God Grade: F



ALEX GARDEN

We still consider *Homeworld* one of the most innovative and gripping strategy games ever created. Too bad we can't say the same for Garden's follow-up, the ambitious yet flawed *Impossible Creatures*. Garden sold his studio to THQ in 2004, and now is living on the internet money train.

Game God Grade: B

CLIFFYB

The only member of the Game Gods cover foursome to crank out another genuine hit, CliffyB achieved monumental success with *Gears of War* (coming out for PC this year!). Young, outspoken, and generally likable, CliffyB is the high-profile designer that 12-year old LIVE players want to be when they hit puberty. He also scores bonus points for keeping in touch with the hoi polloi on the SomethingAwful.com forums.

Game God Grade: A-

*** Insert: Chris Taylor, Greg Vederman, Ken Levine, and CliffyB. One of these guys is NOT a game god.

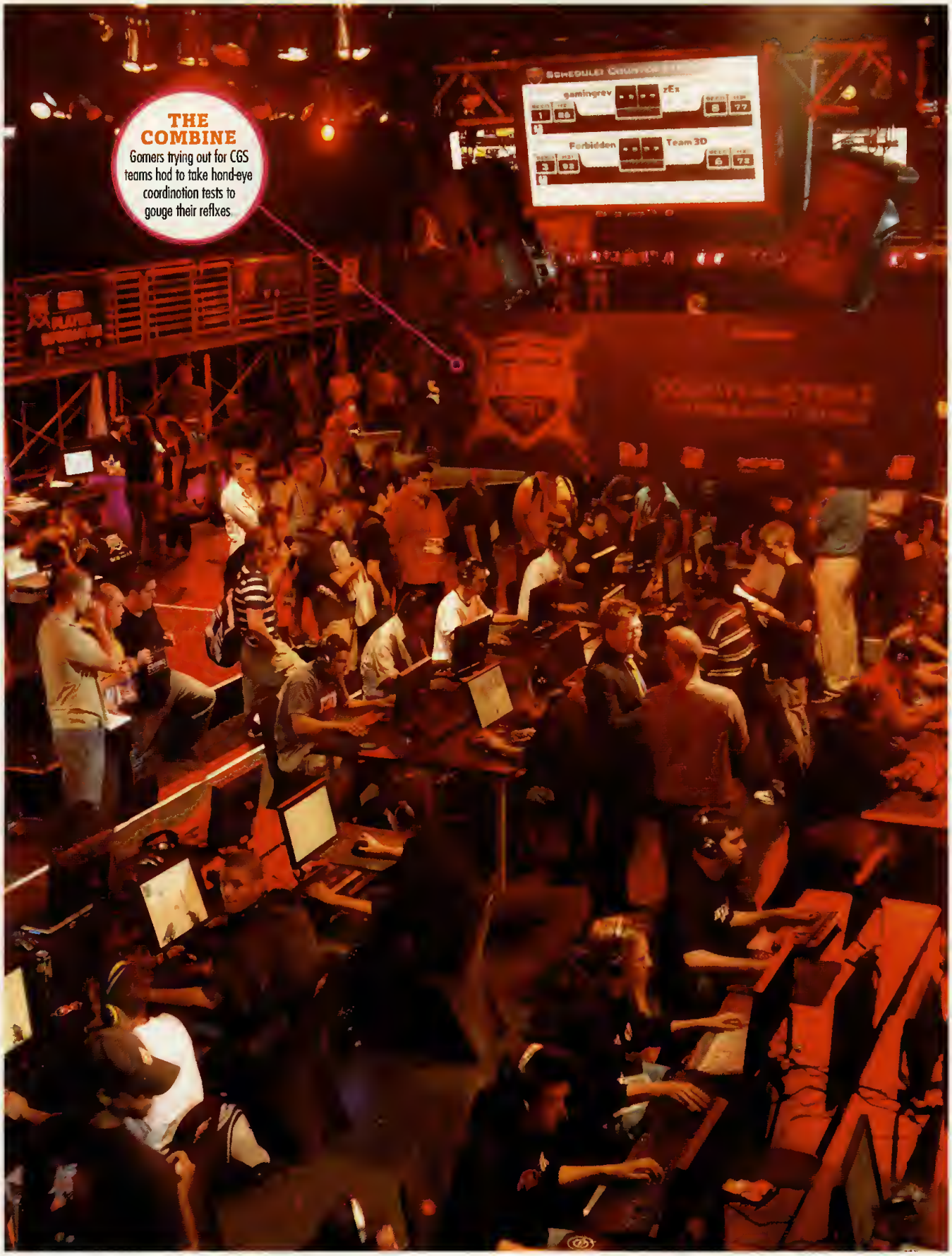




BOOTH BABES GONE BYE-BYE

WHY DOES E3 HATE OUR FREEDOMS?

Location change wasn't the only thing that made 2007's Electronic Entertainment Expo a departure from previous years. Aside from meetings that were spread across various hotels in sunny Santa Monica, the only centralized exhibit floor was in the modest Barker Hanger located miles away from the beachfront. This year's event also marked the first time in recent memory that E3 was free of booth babes. Apparently, scantily-clad trade show models were distracting attendees from the actual games (last year, $5000 fines were imposed for models showing midriff), so the booth babes had to go. To these purveyors of product awareness, we salute you.



THE COMBINE
Gamers trying out for CGS teams had to take hand-eye coordination tests to gauge their reflxes

FROM FAUX SPORT TO PRO SPORT

FORGET THE CPL. MANAGERS, DRAFTS, PLAYER SALARIES, AND LIVE TV COVERAGE ELEVATE THE CHAMPION GAMING SERIES ABOVE OTHER SO-CALLED GAMING "LEAGUES"

After half an hour of heated competition, the score is 9 to 9 going into sudden death overtime in a close match between rival teams Complexity and EFG. The two world-class *Counter-Strike* squads are used to intense pressure, having competed in plenty of gaming tournaments in the past. But today, the five players on each squad aren't playing just for themselves; each round they win serves a higher purpose, scoring important points for a larger gaming team.

Both teams have been drafted into competitive gaming *franchises*—just one of the chief distinctions establishing the Championship Gaming Series as the first real gaming league.

"The CGS is the first and only worldwide professional gaming league, instead of just being a series of [competitive] events," explains Kat Hunter, manager of the San Francisco Optx. The Optx are one of six franchises created in the CGS' inaugural year, each helmed by a team manager charged with drafting and crafting a highly competitive gaming team of 10 players (five *Counter-Strike*, one *FIFA*, two *Project Gotham Racing*, and two *Dead or Alive 4* players). Over the month spanning the league's regular season, each of the six teams plays 12 matches to vie for a spot in the playoffs, in which the top two teams will be sent to challenge other nations' representative teams.

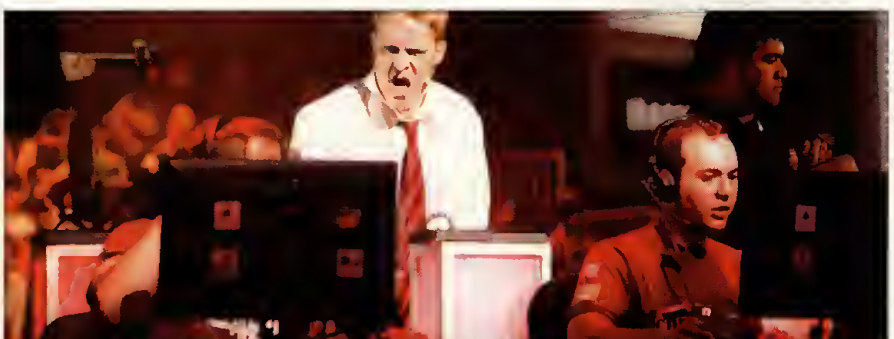
While the tournament format may resemble past global gaming events like the World Cyber Games, the organizational structure of the franchise system is a bold new direction for competitive gaming. Aspiring professional gamers were enlisted from both online preliminary tryouts and college tours that began last year, qualifying a pool of top players to show off their skills at the "Combine," a three-day scouting showcase for managers to observe players' skills. Then, with a draft modeled after the NFL's popular system (complete with up-to-the-minute coverage and online analysis), players recruited to the CGS franchises were actually signed to an annual contract that guarantees them a $30,000 salary plus bonuses based on performance.

For players like Kyle Miller, who plays as KSharp with *Counter-Strike* champions, Team3D, the CGS "brings much-needed organization and stability to a risky profession." And though the contract locks players exclusively into competitions run by the CGS, managers work with players on a case-by-case basis to determine their involvement in other gaming tournaments. The tradeoff is a worthwhile one for players who may compete in dozens of events a year without a steady paycheck. "In the past, gamers have sacrificed a lot to pursue a career in gaming. But with the CGS, it's nice to have security," says Miller.

Aside from the organizational details, CGS' presentation may be its greatest asset in appealing to both spirited and casual gamers alike. In fact, the CGS has signed a multi-year deal with DirecTV to broadcast all of its matches live via the satellite network. The matches we watched over the CGS website (www.thecgs.com) sparkled with showy presentation values—everything from the gaming stage to the professional commentators and studio audience made the competition feel like a first-class sports show. It's clear that the CGS' producers know they have to create a viewing experience that'll be visually stimulating enough for the mass market without spurning the hardcore followers who just want meticulous play-by-play reports.

So far, the balance of sport and showiness is yielding an undeniably entertaining spectacle. Team jerseys skinned onto *Counter-Strike* in-game models help clarify the action on screen, and the color commentary accompanying the action adds welcome flavor to the occasional pauses in battle. When the camera focuses on the actual gamers, managers screaming pep talks in their ears thankfully steal the focus away from the blank faces of competitors glued to their monitors.

Even though it's off to a great start, the CGS' target of bringing gaming to the masses is an uphill battle, but one the league is prepared to take on for the long haul. "We've made a multi-year commitment with the CGS," says Kat Hunter. "The first year is about cracking the TV bug, then we're going to take it to the local level with training facilities and exhibition games." It's an ambitious undertaking that's well on its way with the endorsement of top players. The only thing the CGS needs now is the support of viewers.



/// Jason Lake of the LA Complexity won the first CGS Manager of the Year title. ///



GAMES ARE DEMANDING MISTRESSES

Consider this a cautionary tale. Eight short years ago I worked for PC Accelerator, which was established on the simple premise that a cutting-edge PC is the one true home for real gamers. I wrote many of the tech reviews for that magazine and operated a personal PC rig that was the envy of the pocket protector crowd.

From our high-and-mighty position we gleefully heaped scorn on the dinosaur gamers of our day - middle-aged, bearded hex-based war gamers endlessly reliving the battles of Rommel, Robert E. Lee and that guy who crossed the Alps with the elephants (I think his name was Tarzan).

We also made fun of little girls and the games they played.

Sadly, since that time, I've regressed so far down the gamer evolutionary latter, that I've clearly become a ridicule target of this magazine's core readers. My current playlist is mired pitifully in the past. *Starcraft*, *Red Alert 2*, *Warcraft III*, and *Unreal Tournament 2003* are games I've actually played in the last two months. My PC hardware is so out of date that when I wanted to try my hand at *GRAW2* and *Tiberium Wars*, I did so shamefully... on a sofa with a Xbox 360 controller in my hands.

The reason for my downfall is obvious. I quit staying current with the latest PC Gaming tech. I still have a PC that meets PCXL's high-aiming qualifications for 1999. Those specs included a Pentium II 450 processor, 128MB RAM, Windows 98, 10 GB Hard Drive, Voodoo 2/TNT combo and, uh, speakers. Unfortunately, my 1999 Ferrari F355 now drives like a 2007 Suzuki Reno.

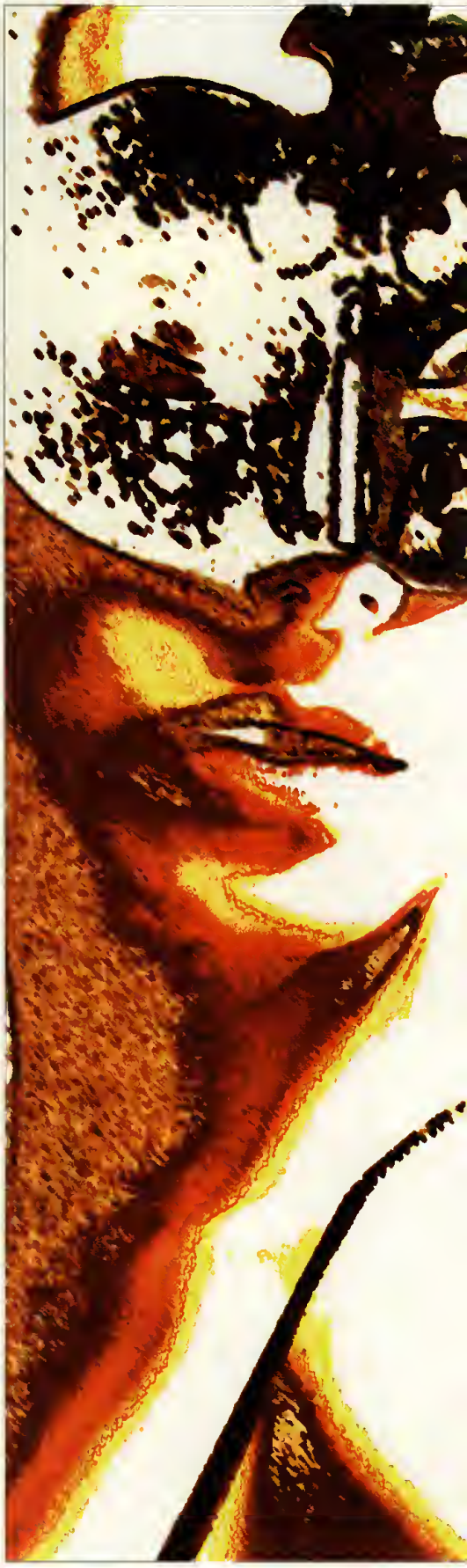
Today, however, is clearly the time for blacklagged PC gamers to catch up with the new technology. For the first time in my memory, the newest generation of consoles didn't have the visual oomph to leapfrog the best and most current PC graphics. The PS3 and the Xbox 360 promised the world, but have yet to deliver anything as visually astounding as the upcoming PC-exclusive shooter, *Crysis*.

More importantly, PC tech is just getting better while console tech stays stagnant. Heck, Sony is even claiming that it wants a 10-year cycle for the PS3. If PC technology is eating the PS3's lunch right now... imagine how big the gap will be in 10 years.

So, enjoy the following games and tech section... keep up with every chip, card and wonky peripheral. Do whatever you must to stay ahead of the curve. Cost should not be an obstacle. That's why Donald Trump invented 24-hour pawnshops. Grandpa's gold pocket watch isn't doing you any favors locked in Grandma's jewelry box.

Buy that new graphics GPU, upgrade to that laser GPS mouse and snag that enclosed hyperbaric gaming chair you've had your eye on. Because if you miss even one jump in PC tech, you're certain to end up like me - wondering how you're going to save up enough free cash to pay for both *Starcraft II* and the total system upgrade you'll need to play it.

DAN EGGER
ATTORNEY AT LAW [AND FORMER JUNIOR OR SOMETHING EDITOR FOR PCXL]





GAMES & TECH

INSIDE THIS SECTION:

THE BEST-LOOKING GAME EVER MADE
TWO DEATHMATCH CLASSICS REVIVED
HOW TO ASSEMBLE A LEAN MACHINE
TECHO-JARGON EXPLAINED
ROBOTS THAT'LL RULE THE WORLD



CRYSIS

YOUR GAMING RIG WILL CRY UNCLE AND LIKE IT

The history of video game graphics has mostly been an exercise in the fine art of fakery. From sprites animated from a handful of two-dimensional bitmaps to pre-rendered backgrounds or black ovals that once passed for shadows, developers have become experts at sleight-of-hand to fool us into thinking we're looking at more than what's really there.

Crysis represents a vastly more ambitious approach: simulating a living virtual world that reacts to our actions, and even to itself, in a way that's almost indistinguishable from the real world, and doing it all in such a way that everything can be rendered in real-time. The technical sophistication of this shooter accommodates an unprecedented amount of interactivity and open-endedness in the fight to save the planet from an alien invasion.

Your character's "muscle suit" will allow you shift between augmented speed and strength, and even let you cloak for a short amount of time. The enhanced physical prowess come in handy as you're dodging bullets in the jungle, swimming across lagoons, kicking down huts, or knocking down trees. When we played the game at this year's E3, we spent so much time messing around with the environment that we almost forgot to complete the mission objectives. It wasn't until we were ripped to pieces by a hailstorm of bullets from flanking troops that we put our head back into the game.

The graphical realism of *Crysis* will be a benchmark for all shooters for years to come, and is easily the most compelling reason to upgrade your system to Vista with a DirectX10 video card.







/// Actual game screenshot. There, I said it.///

BIOSHOCK

ART DECO, MEET BULLET SHRAPNEL

The buzzword in gaming circles, and one that's been bandied about like spitballs in the *PCXL* office, is *emergent gameplay*. This is when something happens in a game, either by accident or through the machinations of a player, which nobody expected—not even the game's developers.

Irrational Games has shaped *BioShock*, its spiritual successor to *System Shock 2* (no slouch in the emergent gameplay department itself), to be a potential bonanza of emergent moments, thanks in large part to the game's Plasmid system. Plasmids are genetic modifications that, when installed in your character, will give you amazing powers. They are also stackable (meaning you can combine the effects of multiple Plasmids), and in *BioShock's* submerged ruined city of Rapture, their creative implementation is essential to your character's survival.

Not only does the emergent gameplay defy convention, the design of the *BioShock's* elaborate levels and creepy characters also stands out as rebelling against shooter norms. Utilizing Art Deco inspired environment textures and architecture, each room of Rapture is a gorgeous and meticulous work of art, giving you a glimpse of a 1920's era utopia that never was.

With a world that incorporates chance, complex AI relationships, upgradeable weapons, realistic physics, and around 80 different Plasmids that can be mixed in unusual ways, *BioShock* is an FPS that changes what people expect out of playing an FPS.



/// This sure gives a whole new meaning to smoke blown up ones ass. ///

TITLE: BIOSHOCK
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES
PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES
URL: WWW.2KGAMES.COM/BIOSHOCK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW!



/// I should've known better than to bother plumber. ///



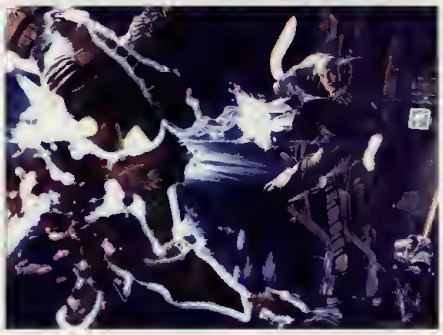
OWN BIG DADDY
The collector's edition of *BioShock* will include a special miniature figurine of Big Daddy.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

DEATHMATCH IS REVIVED IN ALL ITS GORY GLORY

Console gamers might've had the first taste of the Unreal 3 engine with *Gears of War* (which is coming out for PC anyway), but we all know that the Epic Games' brainchild won't reach its full potential until *Unreal Tournament 3*. This is the game that'll bring back high-speed deathmatch in its purest form: just running, jumping, and shooting, without any "finding cover" gimmicks.





Playing the game recently at E3 and at Comic-Con, we were astonished to see how fast-paced the game played in light of the spectacular visual effects. Shooting barrages of rockets, shock beams, and bullets while double jumping off walls in deathmatch battles felt just like we remembered in *UT2K4*.

The addition of new vehicles doesn't just beef up the arsenal for players; tanks and gunships from opposing sides of the game will function and play completely differently– vehicles won't have counter-parts for each team. Incorporating truly unique battlefield vehicles shifts the balance of rounds and forces fraggers to adopt new strategies when playing in team deathmatch or assault games.

Even with the new mechanics, *Unreal Tournament* diehards won't have to worry about being alienated by the new features of *UT3*. Jeff Morris, producer of the game, reassured us that "Ultimately, the vehicles *feel* like *UT*, and as long as we don't leave behind what people liked about the original games, we feel there's a good balance."



QUAKEWARS

WE FINALLY KNOW WHAT WAR IS GOOD FOR

Does the world need another futuristic class-based shooter? We asked Kevin Cloud, Executive Producer at id and Paul Wedgwood, Lead Game Designer at Splash Damage, why we should care about *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. "Because it's *Quake*" would not be an acceptable answer.


/// Hey look at me, I have a golden shield. ///

Kevin Cloud & Paul Wedgwood: "*ETQW* is fundamentally built with the goal of creating gameplay in which teamwork makes a significant difference in whether or not you complete objectives. The game is also unique in pitting asymmetrical forces against one another; it's not just a choice between two similar but differently named weapons; the choice of whether to play Strogg or GDF has significant impact. The strategies are different, and the experience is very different.

We're using our Megatexture technology to put players on the front lines of a futuristic war between two very different forces—the Strogg, with weapons and vehicles which are based on the manipulation of energy and physics, and the GDF, a more conventional human fighting force that employs tanks and machine guns. The combat is focused on a front line, so players always know where to go and where they can contribute most to help their team. And we've developed systems within the game, like Solo Assignments that help newer players know precisely where to go and what to do to be successful.

One of the keys to the fun in *ETQW* is diversity. The single-player missions are centered on specific and varying objectives that make sense within the context of the overall mission, the environment, and the war between the Earth and the Strogg. Your actions push the battle and the front line forward, and as that front line moves, either into new terrain or new objectives, your team's strategies also must adjust."

Well, color us convinced. After all, it *is Quake*.



TABULA RASA

THIS MMO'S RICH CONTENT MAKES IT ANYTHING BUT A BLANK SLATE

How important is Richard Garriott, executive producer at NCsoft, to roleplaying games? Check *this* out: Without him, there may never have been a *World of Warcraft*. Or an *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. And there definitely wouldn't have been an *Ultima* franchise. The man who almost single-handedly forged the computer RPG genre has been overseeing the creation of NCsoft's next big MMO: *Tabula Rasa*.

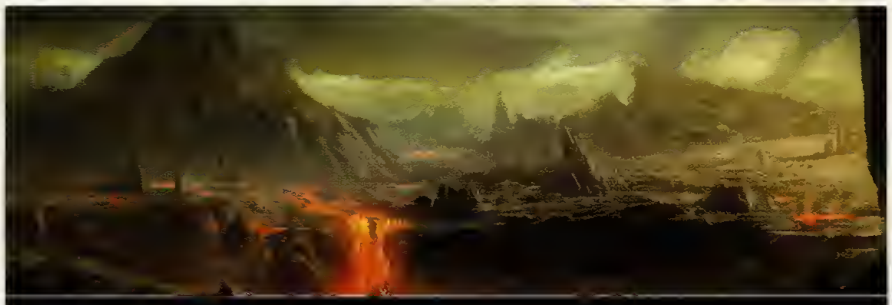


Literally meaning "blank slate" in Latin, *Tabula Rasa* is an epic, multiple-planet-spanning RPG, bustling with explosive battlefield action, ethical decision-making, and a shockingly deep mythology, personally authored by Garriott himself.

One of the differences you'll notice between *Tabula Rasa* and just about every other MMO on the market is that you don't choose a class when creating a character. All entry-level players are Recruits, and you'll have access to basic armor and weapons, such as pistols, rifles, and shotguns. At level 5, you'll be able to become a Soldier or Specialist, and as your military career continues, you'll further specialize along a branching career path. What's also unique about this setup is that you can opt to create a "clone" of your character before undertaking a new class, so if you find you aren't enjoying that class, or simply get the urge to try out a different one, you can load up a clone and proceed down an alternate career path.

Of all the MMOs we've played, *Richard Garriott's Tabula Rasa* is among the most accessible and ambitious. It bypasses the typical grind of leveling and gets you into the meat of the game very quickly, while telling some truly interesting stories along the way.





/// Fantasy themed MMOs are way to cliche. We'd rather be grinding away in a sci-fi wasteland. ///

VITAL STATS
TITLE: SPORE
GENRE: MMORPG
DEVELOPER: MAXIS
PUBLISHER: EA
URL: WWW.SPORE.COM
RELEASE DATE: 2008



LIFEFORM GOES HERE
In *Spore*, you'll be able to traverse the galaxy, abducting and planting life on any planet.

SPORE

WE CAN'T WAIT TO CRAFT CREATURES WITH FIVE WANGS

We may be *Sims* fans to varying degrees, but everyone at *PCXL* is weak with anticipation over Will Wright's upcoming opus, *Spore*. For those who've been on a strict low-media diet, *Spore* simulates...well, life. You evolve from a microscopic organism into a land creature, develop civilization and technology, and eventually conquer planets—your own and others'.

As you progress through the game's phases, your evolution earns you money that you use to create stuff, like creatures, buildings, and vehicles. Only the genius of a Game God like Will Wright could deliver on game with a scope so mind-bogglingly epic.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the game will be its creation tool. As the intelligent design behind your universe, you have the ability to craft and shape almost every element that goes into the game. As daunting as that may sound, designing creatures, vehicles, and buildings actually looks to be a cinch with the aid of the game's incredibly robust model editor.

Maxis has recruited the top coding gurus to design procedural algorithms that assist in the dynamic creation of models, textures, sounds, and animations. That means that the amount of input and direction you have to give the game to design a creature, for instance, is entirely up to you. If you only like designing the look of creatures, you can focus on physical appearance while the engine computes how your finished creations move and interact with the world.

With so much freedom and power to shape worlds to your liking, Spore is shaping up to be the most awesome sandbox ever conceived.





PEGGLE

BLOWING UP SHINY ORANGE BALLS HAS NEVER BEEN SO ADDICTING

VITAL STATS
TITLE: PEGGLE
GENRE: CASUAL GAME
DEVELOPER: POPCAP GAMES
PUBLISHER: POPCAP GAMES
URL: WWW.POPCAP.COM
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW!

The staff here at PCXL are a disagreeable bunch. Anyone walking by our offices will hear us arguing about the most trivial topics – the writing quality of recent Simpsons episodes, Michael Bay's directorial merits (or lack of), or the outcome of a Star Wars vs Star Trek battle, to name a few. But the one thing we can all agree on – *Peggle* is the best thing ever.

As self-declared *Peggle* champions, we'd like to share some hints to mastering this addicting "casual" game. If you haven't had a chance to try the game out, we recommend downloading the demo immediately. We guarantee that you'll be dreaming of bouncing metal balls and shimmering orange pegs for weeks.

- Try to get the out-of-the-way orange pegs early. Think to yourself, "If I don't ever shoot here is the ball likely to bounce here by itself?" In general, this means that you should try to hit the higher pegs first. This is one instance when the trickle-down theory works!
- Aiming your shot to run parallel to a line of bricks can lead into a slide that hits all of the bricks plus yield bonuses.
- Use the mouse wheel or arrow keys to fine-tune your shots with the greatest precision.
- The total score on a given shot is determined by adding up the point values of all of the pegs hit during that shot, then multiplying this number by the number of pegs hit. This means that it's important to hit a lot of pegs and to hit pegs that are worth a lot of points.
- Master Hu, the Zen Owl, is the bomb.





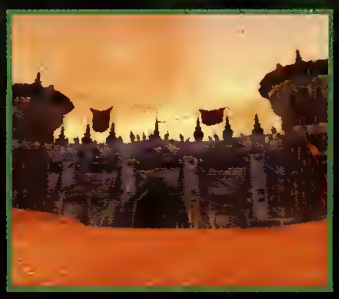
THE NEW VIRTUAL REALITY

Jack In



With the iWear® VR920

With the new iWear VR920, you can bring your gaming experience one level closer to the immersion you crave. Now you can get inside, explore your favorite 3D environments, and communicate with your friends – just like in the real world. The lightweight Video Eyewear simulates a 62" screen at 9 feet and features full stereoscopic 3D, integrated head tracking, a built-in microphone and removable speakers. Jack in and live your favorite game!



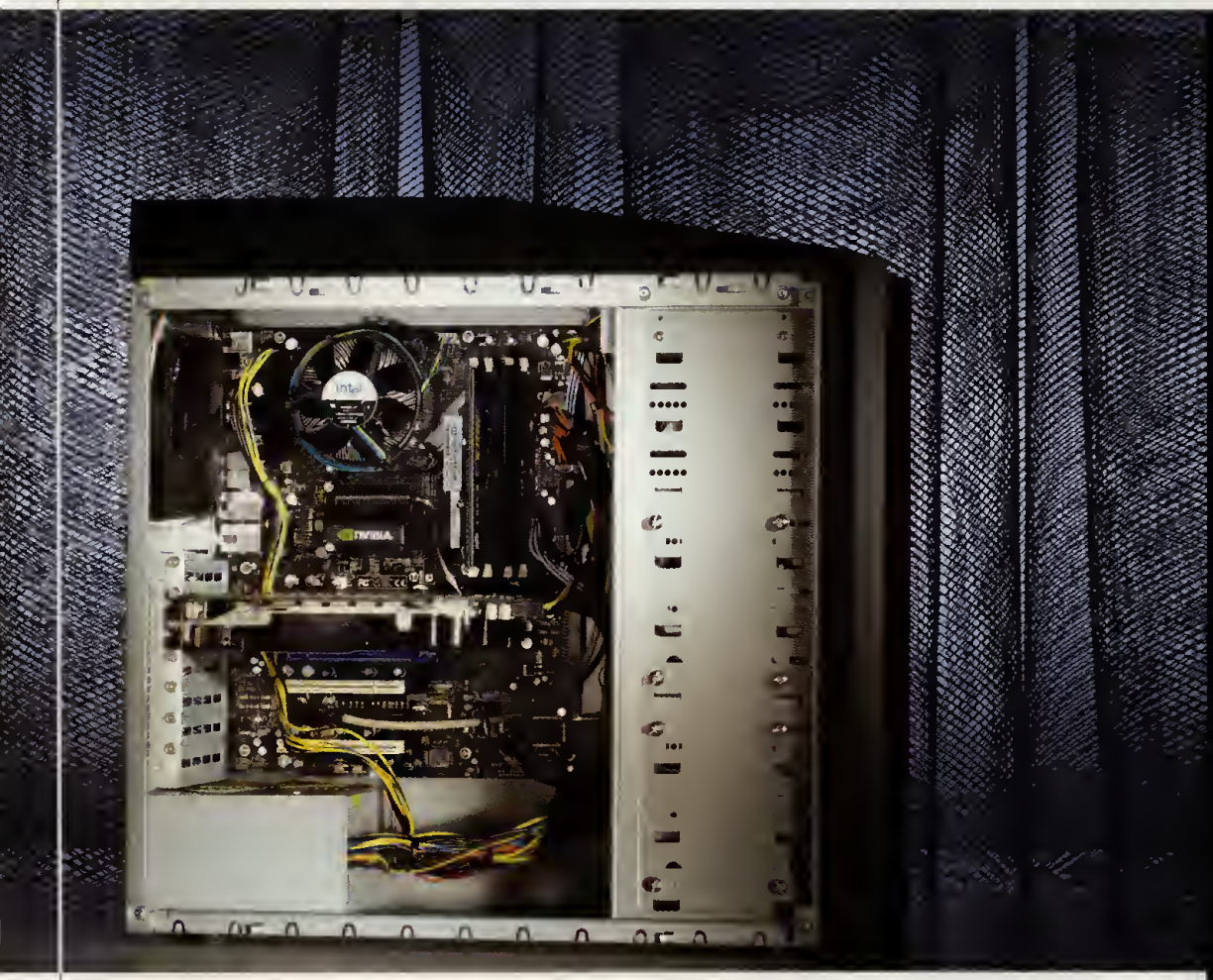
Supports a growing list of titles such as World of Warcraft®, Second Life® and Microsoft® Flight Simulator X

For detailed specs or to purchase the iWear VR920 visit **www.vuzix.com**

BONUS: *Receive a free immersive light-shield. Just enter* ***052: The Answer is 42*** *in the comments section while placing your order online.*

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VUZIX
VIDED EYEWEAR



HOW-TO: ASSEMBLE THE WORLD'S BEST $1337 PC

WE PICK THE PARTS, YOU DO THE REST

Listen up, penny pinchers. Here's everything you need to build a dual-core machine that'll be able to run DirectX 10 on the cheap, with a hell of a lot of upgrade possibilities.

GOT QUAD?

We don't have a quad-core CPU—that would have broken the bank—but we're ready to drop one in when it's more affordable. For now, our Core 2 Duo overclocked to 3.06GHz serves us just fine, thank you.

NO SOUND FOR ME ARGENTINA

One of the most painful sacrifices we made to get a DX10-ready box was to forego a soundcard. Even worse, we're left with crappy Realtek onboard audio. In the end, DX10 capabilities took priority.

NOT JUST FOR THE BLIND

The parts list doesn't include a monitor (we had to cheat to reach the target price), but we'd recommend a 20" widescreen Dell monitor which runs for about $250 online. If you have more cash, aim for the 24".

NINE HUNDRED FANS

You can't see the fans from this angle, but the Antec Nine Hundred case is all fan. With a 20cm (!!!) fan on top and three 12cm fans, this chasis won't have temp issues in the summer.

OUR FIRST UPGRADES

We made some compromises to get next-gen graphics today. Our first round of scheduled upgrades to this rig will probably include a second gig of memory, a soundcard, and Vista (if the DirectX 10 games have arrived).

PARTS AND PRICE LIST

VIDEOCARD
8FG GeForce 8800 GTS
$350, www.bfgtech.com

MOTHERBOARD
EVGA nForce 680i SLI
$250, www.evga.com

CPU
Intel Core 2 Duo E6300
$167, www.intel.com

MEMORY
1GB Corsair TwinX DDR2/800
$150, www.corsair.com

CASE
Antec Nine Hundred
$140, www.antec.com

POWER SUPPLY
Antec TruePower Trio 650
$125, www.antec.com

OPERATING SYSTEM
Windows XP Professional OEM
$100, www.microsoft.com

HARD DRIVE
250GB Maxtor DiamondMax 9
$70, www.maxtor.com

OPTICAL DRIVE
Lite-On It Super AllWrite SHM-165H6S
$35, www.liteonit.com

TOTAL: $1,337

CPUS

MULTI-CORE CPUS ARE THE FUTURE, WHETHER YOU'RE GOING DUAL-CORE OR JOINING THE QUAD SQUAD

INTEL CORE 2 EXTREME QX6700



SPECS
CATEGORY DREAM
CLOCK SPEED: 2.66GHZ
L2 CACHE: 8MB
POWER DRAW: 125W TDP
PROCESS: 65NM
PRICE $999 (M.S.R.P.)

WHAT'S UNIQUE

The quad-core QX6700 is essentially two dual-core CPUs tucked into a single die, and its performance blows away that of every other consumer processor on the market in multithreaded applications and games. Relatively few games have been optimized to take advantage of multi-core CPUs, but that will change soon. Valve, for example, has thrown its support behind multi-core CPUs, and gamers with dual-core and quad-core CPUs can expect more spectacular physics effects and more sophisticated artificial intelligence in Valve's repertoire of gaming delights.

Intel will be releasing slower-clocked and less expensive versions of its quad-core proc about the time you read this. But if you can afford it, don't hesitate to splurge on the Core 2 Extreme QX6700.

PROS

- *Way* faster multithreaded performance
- Bragging rights
- You'll pay more for it, but you'll get lots of mileage

CONS

- Not much of a bump for unoptimized games/apps
- Piggybank-buster

AMD FX-74 (PAIRED)



SPECS
CATEGORY DREAM
CLOCK SPEED: 3GHZ **L2 CACHE:** 4MB
POWER DRAW: 250W
PROCESS: 90NM
PRICE $1000 (M.S.R.P.—TOTAL)

WHAT'S UNIQUE

The FX-74 is the flagship processor in AMD's new Quad FX platform that pairs up two dual-core Socket 1207 processors for quad-core action. Each FX-74 is a dual-core processor running at 3GHz (FX-72 and FX-70 pairs at 2.8GHz and 2.6GHz, respectively, are also being sold as part of the series) with 1MB of L2 cache per core.

AMD is positioning Quad FX as a platform for the gaming elite who want the option of trading up to an eight-core system once AMD releases its quad-core procs this fall, but as a gaming platform, Quad FX appears fraught with peril. The processors draw a huge amount of power at peak, require a new motherboard that won't fit in a mid-tower case, and preliminary benchmarks indicate that you still won't get performance equivalent to Intel's single quad-core proc.

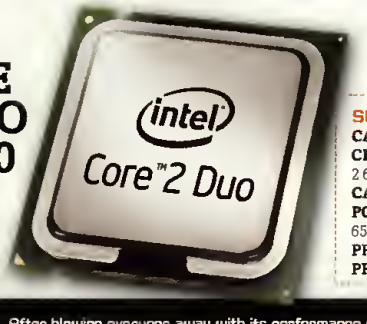
PROS

- Processor pairs are slightly cheaper than Intel's Core 2 Extreme
- Upgrade path to the world of eight-core processing

CONS

- Rapacious appetite for power
- Requires a new motherboard and full-tower case
- Not as fast as a QX6700

CORE 2 DUO E6700



SPECS
CATEGORY MID
CLOCK SPEED: 2.66GHZ **L2 CACHE:** 4MB
POWER DRAW: 65W TDP
PROCESS: 65NM
PRICE $350 (M.S.R.P.)

WHAT'S UNIQUE

After blowing everyone away with its performance when Intel unveiled its Core 2 Duo line of processors last year, the E6700 is dazzling gamers today with its down-from-the-clouds price. Although not the fastest processor on the market for gamers, it gets the *PCXL* seal of approval for having something to offer for *everyone*.

Thrifty folk can pat themselves on the back for buying a processor in the "sweet spot" about a notch and a half below the latest tech (Intel's QX6700). Gamers can enjoy a dual-core proc that doesn't choke frame rates when other tasks are going on in the background. And anyone taking the Windows Vista plunge this year will enjoy a fat speed boost over single-core processors, thanks to Vista's sophisticated multithreading.

PROS

- Reasonably priced dual core proclitude
- You won't get a huge performance bump with dual—yet

CONS

- Not as fast as quad in multithreaded apps and games
- It's not free

ATHLON 64 X2 3800+ (SOCKET AM2)



SPECS
CATEGORY ENTRY
CLOCK SPEED: 2GHZ
L2 CACHE: 1MB
POWER DRAW: 65W TDP
PROCESS: 90NM
PRICE $195 (STREET)

WHAT'S UNIQUE

Times are good when even the entry-level processor that I can recommend has two cores. Let's recap why dual core is important even for entry-level systems. Even while you're playing games, your operating system has loads of tasks running in the background. These tasks—as well any other applications you might be running—can end up fighting with your game for CPU time, resulting in slower frame rates. Dual- and quad-core processors allow background tasks to do their business on one core, while your game sits on another, so they don't get all up in each other's faces.

So buy as much graphics muscle as you can afford, and trade up to a dual-core processor that will help prevent background tasks from strangling your frame rates.

PROS

- Dual core for chump change
- Low power requirement and low heat output

CONS

- Processor will probably need to be upgraded to something faster in 1 to 2 years

A CPU's "process" refers to the level of miniaturization it uses; the smaller the process, the less distance data has to travel, making your CPU faster.

VIDEOCARDS

THE ONE PART THAT WILL MAKE OR BREAK YOUR GAMING MACHINE

NVIDIA GEFORCE 8800 GTX



SPECS
CATEGORY: DREAM
CORE CLOCK: 575MHZ
MEMORY: 768MB GDDR3
PRICE: MSRP $599.99
URL: WWWNVIDIA.COM

WHAT'S UNIQUE

After a brilliant four-year reign, the era of DirectX 9 is over, and the dawn of DirectX 10 is upon us—but that light ain't gonna shine on you without a DirectX 10–compatible video card. And that card is NVIDIA's GeForce 8800 GTX.

NVIDIA pulled out all the stops on this one, building a card from scratch that dispenses with the traditional pixel and vertex shader units in favor of 128 "stream processors" that can perform a number of diverse tasks, acting as vertex shaders one moment and as physics processors the next, for example. It's a very efficient design that allows developers to fully exploit the 8800 GTX's resources and splurge on high-falutin' particle effects, employ soft and detailed shadows, and even integrate more realistic physics into their games.

The GeForce 8800 GTX also comes at you with a colossal 768MB frame buffer designed to take advantage of a DirectX 10 feature called "stream output," which allows data coming from the stream processors to be sent directly to memory, then back to the shader units to be reused instead of continuing down through the end of the graphics pipeline before it can be reprocessed.

All this processing power doesn't run on milk and Grape Nuts, though. A single GeForce 8800 GTX video card requires two six-pin power supply connectors to run (NVIDIA recommends a 450W power supply), and if you want to run two 8800 GTXes in SLI configuration, you'll need four six-pin connectors and a 850W power supply—at least.

The GeForce 8800 GTX makes heavy demands on your wallet as well. But with a single 8800 GTX smoking two 7900 GTXes in some benchmarks, it's not a tough call. If you're happy with your current video card, you can wait until the tide of DX 10 games rises. But if it's time for an upgrade, the GeForce 8800 GTX is the only choice for hard-core gamers with deep pockets.

PROS
- The most powerful DX 10–compatible video card
- Efficient design keeps the entire card working at capacity
- Oodles of memory

CONS
- Let's see those DX10 games, folks
- Top-of-the-line card; top-of-the-line price

NVIDIA GEFORCE 8800 GTS



SPECS **CATEGORY:** Dream **CORE CLOCK:** 500MHz **MEMORY:** 640MB GDDR3 **PRICE:** MSRP $449.99 **URL:** wwwnvidia.com

WHAT'S UNIQUE

If you just can't shake enough change out of the couch to meet the price tag of the 8800 GTX, NVIDIA offers the slightly less-brawny, DX10-ready 8800 GTS for $150 less. The specs are notched down pretty much across the board: There are 96 stream processors on the GTS instead of the 128 on the GTX; the core clock runs at 500MHz instead of 575MHz, and the memory clock runs at 800MHz on the GTS instead of 900MHz. Memory is reduced to 640MB from the 768MB on the GTX—but that's still plenty, as this card really screams even in today's games.

PROS
- A less-expensive ticket to the DirectX 10 party
- Requires only one six-pin power supply connector

CONS
- Roughly 20% slower than the GTX overall
- The DirectX 10 party hasn't quite started yet

ATI RADEON X1950 PRO



SPECS
CATEGORY: DREAM
CORE CLOCK: 575MHZ
MEMORY: 256MB GDDR3
PRICE: MSRP $299
URL: WWW.ATI.COM

WHAT'S UNIQUE

Wow—tough sell. ATI's Radeon X1950 Pro is a great deal for the price, clocking in at about the same performance level as a GeForce 7900 GS, and will buy you decent frame rates at 1600x1200 with full-screen antialiasing enabled on most games. And—at last—you can slap two X1950 Pro cards together in a CrossFire config without that lame external dongle. But, alas, the X1950 Pro isn't compatible with DirectX 10, limiting its useful lifespan for most.

PROS
- Good video card love for the price
- No dongle required for CrossFire

CONS
- Not DirectX 10 compatible

DirectX 10 will only be available under Windows Vista. Some DirectX 10 games may run under other operating systems, but only with DX10 disabled



WTF IS PARALLAX MAPPING?

NO, IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE GREEN LANTERN CORP

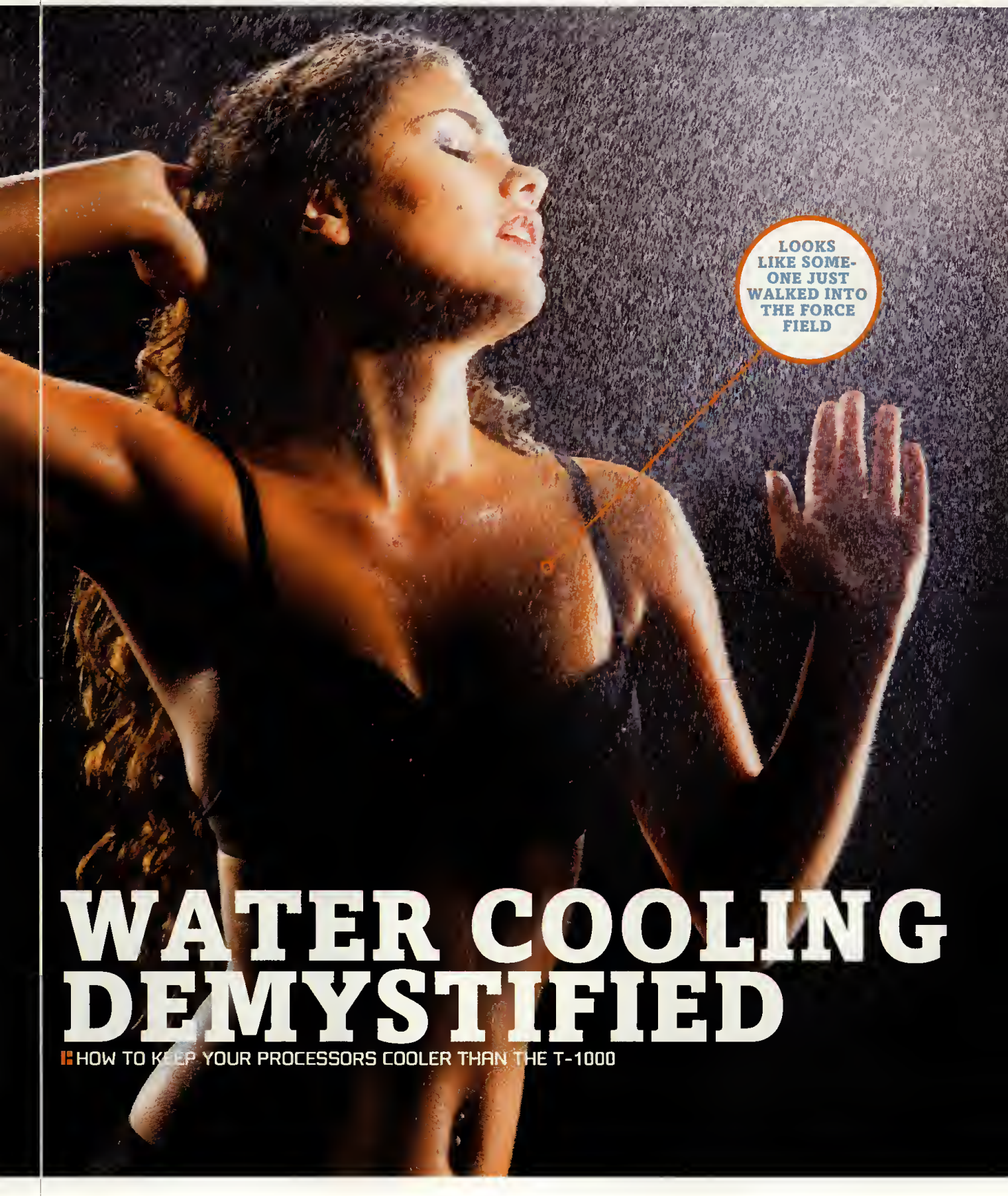
Leave it to the genius of graphics engine programmers and mathematical whiz kids to devise complex ways to making video games look incredible. While the casual gamer may probably never appreciate the intricate use of pixel and vertex shaders in giving a game character slimy scales or a spiked hide, we're whole-hearted supporters of pulling away the wool to reveal the coding trickery behind realistic renders.





The latest technology at artists' disposal is a texture technique called Parallax mapping. You might've heard of bump-mapping, which is the process of applying a "bump map" graphics layer to flat surfaces for graphics engines to compute surface displacements. This means that normally smooth surfaces, such as walls or spheres, can look "bumpy" without adding more polygons to the original model. While bump mapping is a visual technique that's simple to implement and has minimal computational costs, it's limited by the static nature of the map. No matter what angle or direction you're facing a bump-mapped model, the grooves of the 3d effect look the same.

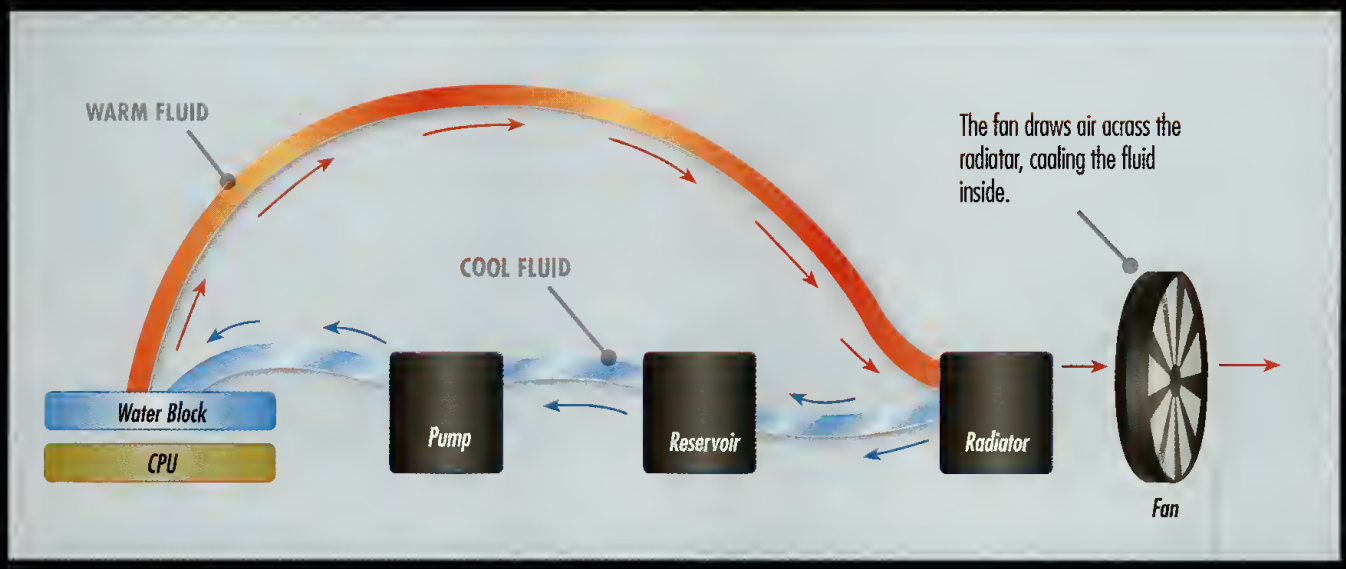
Parallax mapping, however, creates more deeper and realistic model displacements by utilizing some real fancy mathematics. While this method also uses depth maps overlaid on top of flat models, the engine now takes into account the angle and perspective of viewer as it executes its rendered fakery. On a wall full of parallax-mapped bullet holes, for example, the apparent depth and shadowing of each hole would shift differently depending on how far you were to them. The heightened illusion of depth allows for much more convincingly representations of wooden floorboards and stone walls. Artists can meticulously design reference models for displacement maps to synthesize to create awe-inspiring scenes that might actually sport lower polygon counts than older games.



WATER COOLING DEMYSTIFIED

HOW TO KEEP YOUR PROCESSORS COOLER THAN THE T-1000

COOLING A HOT CPU



HOW IT WORKS The pump draws cool liquid from the reservoir and pushes it over a water block clamped to the CPU's heat spreader. Heat transfers from the CPU to the water block and from the water block to the liquid, which is then pumped into the radiator. The cooled liquid then returns to the reservoir.

Modern PCs are hot, and not just in a trendy sort of way; the thin wires and tiny circuits packed into the space of a CPU, GPU, and other components generate significant heat. Without proper cooling, a CPU can rapidly achieve 350 C and start a fire in the process of burning itself out.

You're unlikely to pop a heatsink in the middle of use, however, and even if you did, systems are typically designed to shut themselves down long before going critical. But managing heat has a tremendous impact on your PC's performance. Pumping liquid through your machine can be a quieter and more efficient alternative to traditional air cooling.

The easiest way to boost your PC's cooling quotient is to add more fans, but the downside is that you also increase its noise level—a not-so-desirable trade-off. One way to get around this problem is to replace air with a more effective cooling agent: liquid. Ordinary tap water can transfer heat more efficiently than forced air, and there are plenty of more exotic and more effective liquids to choose from.

But liquid cooling has its drawbacks, too: Cost and complexity are the most common barriers, which is why so few mainstream PC manufacturers have gone down this road with their mass-produced products. Outfitting your own rig with a liquid-cooling system generally costs from $150 to $300 but can run much more than that. A failure—in the form of a leak or a kinked or clogged tube, for instance—can destroy a system in an instant. Maintenance is another issue that must be taken into consideration.

A liquid-cooled PC is a cyclical system that moves fluid over hot components, transferring that heat to the fluid, and then pumping the fluid away for cooling. In this type of system, a water block takes the place of a heatsink: It's clamped to the component in the same way and transfers heat from the processor to the thin copper or aluminum wall of the water block. From there, the heat passes to liquid coursing through tubing attached to the block.

This tubing carries the warmed liquid to a radiator, which transfers heat from the liquid into the air. A fan mounted in front of the radiator draws air over the radiator's fins, following the same principle as a heatsink, in order to increase the radiator's effectiveness. Most cooling systems use a centrifugal pump to forcibly circulate the fluid.

In more elaborate configurations, the liquid might pass through water blocks attached to other components—e.g., the graphics processor, the chipset, or even the RAM—before it reaches the radiator. As with an automobile's cooling system, an overflow reservoir provides a means of storing additional coolant to compensate for the inevitable evaporation. The reservoir also enables you to add coolant without introducing air bubbles into the system.

Ordinary tap water is a good coolant, but more specialized liquids work better. Distilled water is one common choice: It's superior to tap water because it's not as corrosive to metal and it contains fewer of the biological agents that can foster an algae colony. It also has fewer ions than tap water, rendering it less likely to cause a short circuit if your cooling system springs a leak.



PEERLESS PERIPHERALS

YOUR SYSTEM WILL LOVE THESE ACCESSORIES AS MUCH AS YOUR LOVE YOUR LIMBS



◄ WIRELESS GAMING RECEIVER

The Microsoft Wireless Gaming Receiver lets you use any wireless accessory available for the Xbox 360 on your PC—including the Wireless Headset, the Wireless Racing Wheel, and, of course, the Xbox 360 Wireless Controller.

MICROSOFT
$20 (MSRP)
WWW.MICROSOFT.COM



▲ X-ARCADE TANKSTICK

Play those old arcade classics the way they were meant to be played by pounding, beating, and punching the nearly indestructible X-Arcade Tankstink (with pinball side buttons!). Ah, the good ol' days.

X-ARCADE
$200(MSRP)
WWW.X-ARCADE.COM

X-BOX 360 WIRELESS CONTROLLER ►

Now the standard gamepad that all Games for Windows–branded games must support, the Xbox 360 controller also just happens to be comfortable, responsive, durable, and now wireless, too. Don't worry—no one's going to think you've sold out to the console dark side.

MICROSOFT
$40 (MSRP)
WWW.MICROSOFT.COM





◄ G5 LASER MOUSE

The Logitech G5 Laser mouse may just be our favorite mouse ever. With a 2000dpi laser sensor, buttons for adjusting the sensitivity on the fly, and customizable weights that load into a slot on the bottom, this mouse is a time tested favorite among the staff in the office. The newly updated G5 even adds a second thumb button on the left!

LOGITECH
$70 (MSRP)
WWW LOGITECH.COM



◄ X52 PRO FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM

Oh ho ho. This is a gaming joystick that Tim Allen would approve. Whether you're piloting jumbo jets, dogfighting in space combat, or rumbling around in mechs, there's no better way to get immersed in a simulation than with Saitek's flagship product. 30 programmable buttons, led lit switches, an LCD display screen are just a few of the features on this joystick/throttle combination. Flying around in *Battlefield 2* will never be the same again!

SAITEK
$200 (MSRP)
WWW.SAITEK.COM

ROBOTS

I, FOR ONE, WELCOME OUR NEW MECHANICAL OVERLOROS

Today's cutting-edge computer games and hardware are great, but it's the prospect of what hi-tech advances will surprise us in the coming years that drives our passion for technology. Moore's law sets lofty goals for the semiconductor industry, and the dream of a truly convincing virtual reality (a la the Matrix) seems to be the driving force for developing more immersive games.

The futurists in our hearts, however, are only longing for one thing: giant robots. And we won't settle for just any kind of robot; we want giant ones. It's our dream that some day the awesome behemoths that currently roam the airwaves of Japanese television will make their way into reality. Honda's Asimo may be an engineering marvel (he can walk up stairs!) and the iRobot Roomba is no doubt a cute little vacuum cleaner, but they hardly convey the sense of awe of a giant humanoid robot, even if its only task was clearing construction debris. To indulge in our fantasy, here's our list of the five most magnificent robots ever conceived:

1 Optimus Prime – Leader of the Autobots, protector of humanity. Optimus Prime, even with flames, is still the robot that every kid wishes was their older brother.

2 Iron Giant – The title character of the only animated film to make us cry, the Iron Giant rejected his war-bound programming and befriended a lonely kid named Hogarth. Plus, he was a fan of Superman comics!

3 Galactic Colossus – We couldn't leave out robots from video games on our list. Along with the Monkey Lord, the Galactic Colossus rampages through the battlefields of *Supreme Commander*, bringing us endless hours of glee.

4 MechaGodzilla – It's a giant robot combined with the greatest giant monster ever. Did you know that MechaGodzilla even had a fake Godzilla disguise to pose as the green gargantuan? Man in suit! Man in suit!

5 Mechwarrior – When we play these games today, we still make giant robot sounds to pretend that we're actually in a BattleMech. "Vroom! Crunch! Blammy!"

LIP SERVICE
Despite the inclusion of flames and lips to the new Prime design, we still think he kicked ass.



We'll all be commuting to work in Mechs one day

BUY ONE TODAY



BIOLOID
If you can't wait half a century for robotic servants to be stocked at your local Wal-Mart, you can pick up Bioloid, a humanoid automaton developed by engineers in Korea. For under a thousand dollars, you'll get all the components required to assemble a foot-tall mechanical marvel, which you can then program to dance and perform complex motions. While Bioloid can't transform into a car, its modular construction lets you morph it into alternate shapes and configurations. It's no Optimus Prime, but we still want one.

$900
WWW.THINKGEEK.COM

TANGLED IN A SERIES OF TUBES



There's no denying that I'm a child of cyberspace - a worshipper of the world-wide web. From the moment I get up in the morning to the minutes before I slumber in the evening, my mind and eyes are fixated on the seducing lure of the internet. The net is my wired connection to the cutting edge, a tether to breaking news stories and up-to-the minute reports on global events.

But I'm not here to extol the virtues of the internet. If you're reading this magazine, you're undoubtedly well-versed in the world of cyberspace, and all the useful information it has to offer. And that's what the internet really is – a space. Even if that space isn't physical, the virtual landscape it occupies is as real as any place on the planet. And just like any inhabited location, the flow of digital data that makes up the internet has bred its own culture. It's a curious culture that at its best is marked by spirited social interaction, elucidating discussion and rewarding debate. But at its worst, just like any real-world society, internet culture reveals a seedy and chaotic underbelly. This is the world that fascinates me; a domain I affectionately refer to as "the Internets."

The Internets are the forums that permeate through almost every facet of the web, hiding even beneath sites that already only appeal to niche audiences. Aintitcoolnews.com has its community of "talkbackers," vocal movie snobs with enough sway to influence Hollywood marketers. The SomethingAwful.com forums house its legions of "goons," early pioneers in the BitTorrent explosion. Even if you don't know it, these communities are the tastemakers of mainstream internet culture. They are the masters of the meme and the guardians of viral activity. As much as pretentious Web 2.0 advocates like to hype the inevitable democratization of digital space, we'd be hard pressed to wrest control of the internets from their vigilant sovereigns.

But the good news is that the majority of these forumites and comment posters are geeks and gamers. It should come as a relief for you and me to know that these people are on our side, shaping their corner of cyberspace to cater to our interests. That's the reason the most popular webcomic is Penny-Arcade and not Bratz. We can leave the miserable mess of Myspace to the teenyboppers and sleep well knowing that there'll always be a secluded space online to intelligently geek out about games, movies, and music.

And even if you're not so hot on being tangled up in the threads of the Internets, the vanilla internet isn't so bad. It's actually where I spend most of my day, away from the potential heated drama and nonsensical ramblings that almost are a necessity of forum culture. Even if I don't fully understand the social complexities that regulate and nurture forum life, I have a genuine respect for those dwellers and their understated contributions to the web. After all, without them we wouldn't have LolCats, and the world would be a much sadder place.

NORMAN CHAN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PCXL (IS ALSO THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE INTERN OF PC GAMER)





THE INTERNETS

IN THIS SECTION

HOW TO RUN A GAMING BLOG
OUR FAVORITE WEBCOMICS
INTERNET MEMES ANALYZED
WEB BASED SHOOTERS
LARPING ON YOUTUBE

HOW-TO: START YOUR OWN GAME BLOG

EVERYBODY'S A CRITIC



The best way to break into videogame journalism today is start your own gaming blog. Any schmuck can toss up a livejournal page and rant about their *World of Warcraft* character, but it takes persistence and dedication to run a quality gaming news site. Reaching the ranks of Kotaku and Joystiq may a bit of a stretch, but there's no reason you can't create the next great OldManMurray. The rewards of being a game blogger may be meager compared to the effort required, but it's a fair price to pay if you want your voice heard.

Set up a blog with Wordpress: Getting a blog up and running is simpler than you think. Free blogging services and software can be found on Wordpress.com. They'll even host your site for free, if you don't mind sharing their web address. Alternatively, you can buy a clever domain and some hosting space for under 20 bucks a year, depending on your expected traffic.

Find your niche. All-encompassing gaming new sites typically require a dedicated staff of posters cover all their bases. If you're playing the role of writer, editor, and artist, limit yourself to a specific topic, like game mods or graphics cards.

Make frequent posts: Even if it's a slow news day, you want to make some kind of blog post to keep your site fresh. Part of the reason that readers go back to popular blog sites is because they know those blogs are consistently updated with new stories and opinion pieces. Posting five times a day is a decent start, but try to aim for at least ten daily posts if you want to stay competitive.

Post many top ten lists: Readers love controversy, and nothing stirs up debate more than someone claiming to have compiled any definitive list. Top ten lists, no matter how obscure the topic, will usually draw hits as browsers want to determine firsthand if they agree with your picks.

Make bold claims: Seed an online rumor, but only as a last resort to get hits. Nothing grabs the attention of gaming fanboys more than rumors about their favorite game or console system. A little hyperbole goes a long way to getting your stories on the front page of Digg ("console price cuts confirmed!"), even if you lose all journalistic credibility. It's sad that many bloggers forsake accountability for the sake of sensationalism, so we don't recommend doing this unless you've hit rock bottom.

WEBCOMICS

A ROUNDUP OF ONLINE COMICS THAT HAS US GIGGLING LIKE SCHOOLGIRLS

The local comic book store is still our preferred place to get a monthly superhero fix, but webcomics are becoming an increasingly reliable source of entertaining artwork. We're always pleasantly surprised by the consistently funny writing and professionalism of webcomic artists, which is why the following sites have earned a permanent residence in our browser's bookmarks bar.



CHECK OUT THESE WEB COMICS

- **Penny-Arcade** www.penny-arcade.com
- **VG Cats** www.vgcats.com
- **Extra Life** www.myextralife.com
- **Player vs. Player** www.pvponline.com
- **Ctrl+Alt+Del** www.ctrlaltdel-online.com
- **The Perry Bible Fellowship** www.pbfcomics.com

ONE PAD. TWO CHOICES.

With its unique Cyborg module, the new Cyborg Rumble Pad lets you rotate the left analog stick and d-pad and gives you something no other pad has: the freedom to choose how you'd like to move. Thumb up or Thumb down. Either way it's up to you. And with its dedicated FPS and precision buttons, everything quickly falls under your control so you can easily conquer whatever you're conquering.

- Unique Cyborg module allows the switching of the left analog stick and d-pad positions
- FPS button - instantly configure the pad for use in FPS games
- Precision button - with Precision mode enabled, aiming with the analog sticks becomes evan easier
- 2 Quick Fire Shoulder Triggers
- 2 Analog Triggers
- 8-way d-pad
- 6 responsive buttons
- 2 analog joysticks
- Compatible with Windows® XP and Vista
- Fully programmable with SST Programming Software



CYBORG RUMBLE
GAMEPAD FOR PC

Saitek™

www.saitekusa.com





MEMES

FROM ACKBAR TO LOLCATS, WE TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT MAKES A NET FAD TICK

Spend more than ten seconds in your favorite Internet community, and you'll likely run across one of these. They're more widespread than 14-year-old Xbox users; more invasive than an early-game tank rush; more captivating than that new Lara Croft game (who *really* buys them for the gameplay?). Internet memes are the Paris Hiltons of the online world. Attention only makes them stronger, and no matter how hard you try to escape their grasp, you'll still giggle at their contributions to the greater good every now and then.

But what, then, is a meme? It's a cyber-fad. Punctuation in the grand story of the Internet, a meme is born to distract, to draw attention. Memes unite gamers, lazy office workers, and web-forum enthusiasts alike under a shared umbrella of understanding, regardless of one's particular community affliction or surfing habits. Often Photoshopped, and nearly always duplicated, Internet memes are born in absurdity – like a witty mishmash of words over a strange picture, or a funny audio snipped over an animated graphic.

Memes are the Internet's authority on cool. When you know them all, you're only that much more *in-tune* than everybody else.

Trying to trace the history of a meme is like playing a giant game of "I saw it first" against every major water cooler on the Internet. The newest Fark.com cliché might be the transplanted embers of a dying Something Awful forum thread. Hilarious mash-ups YTMND are born in the insanity of the 4chan message boards. Ever watch a funny Flash movie? If Newgrounds didn't have it first, they'll have 30 variants within the week. And half of those will get cross-posted to YouTube.

While their pathways are as random as an STD, some of the best Internet memes filled their Kool-Aid pitchers from the well of video games. Leeroy Jenkins rose from the ashes of a *World of Warcraft* raid gone wrong to become a question on Jeopardy (*Kebert Xela*), and even a tangible playing card. The phrase "All Your Base Are Belong To Us" should practically be in the dictionary by now. If so, Webster would have to open the door for a picture of the "Nintendo 64 Kid" to appear next to the word "crazy."

No matter the meme, one rule remains constant; trying to predict the next patch of witty wildfire is impossible. Contribute if you want, but lame attempts might stir up a "boom headshot" lolcat for your troubles. - *David Murphy*



STREAMING WEB SHOOTER

COMING SOON TO AN INTERNET BROWSER NEAR YOU

One of the bigger announcements at QuakeCon this year was that in addition to the next full-fledged action game (currently titled Rage), id Software has a second internal development team at work on a remake of *Quake 3*. The twist is that this recreation of the celebrated deathmatch game, titled *Quake Zero*, will distributed freely online. The only catch is that the game will actually run in a web browser, a la online Flash Shockwave games.



Quake III Forever's bots are brainless...


...and the Rasterwerks AI isn't much smarter.

We're a little skeptical about whether it's possible to be fully immersed in a deathmatch session if the game is running in a window, especially if the game screen isflanked by obnoxious advertisements. The project did remind us, however, of two other superb web-based shooters. Quake III Forever (http://necromanthus.com) is a crude recreation of the Q3DM1 map, complete with weapons and two bots to play against. Rasterwerks (www.rasterwerks.com) raises the bar by featuring more weapons and working multiplayer support. Neither are worthy substitutes for real FPS games, but until *Quake Zero* comes out, they provide the proof that a shooter can run in a browser.

Groundbreaking. At every altitude.

Welcome to the new PRO series of flight control equipment from Saitek. Specifically designed for those with a discerning taste in luxury and high-end performance, every new feature in this collection of cockpit gear offers an unmatchable range of specifications, technological superiorities and features not found in any other yoke system. Why? To give you a remarkable next-generation control system built without compromise for a superior level of control, comfort and quality.



> PRO FLIGHT YOKE SYSTEM
>> Replicates real aircraft controls
>> Works in all major flight simulations
>> 14 button controls
>> 3-position mode switch
>> Durable, stainless steel yoke shaft
>> Saitek Smart Technology programming included
>> Built-in chronometer for in-flight timing
>> Intergrated 3 port USB hub
>> Includes Pro Flight Throttle Quadrant

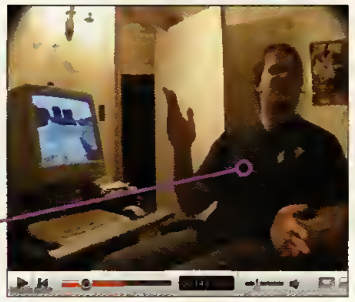
> PRO FLIGHT THROTTLE QUADRANT
>> 3 axis levers
>> 6 button controls
>> Can be used with any joystick or yoke
>> Quadrant can be mounted in 4 different orientations
>> Saitek Smart Technology programming software included
>> Matches the Pro Flight Yoke System to extend your number of axis controls

Saitek™

www.saitekusa.com

YOUTUBE YOKELS

WE FIND MORE UWE BOLLS THAN STEVEN SPIELBERGS



LONG ISLAND GAMERS
We're not sure if this gaming documentary was serious. Search for it on YouTube to decide for yourself.

I don't think people really understand the unbelievable demands on the modern woman's time. I mean, I feel like I've barely had the chance to play a game for a few hours before it's time to make daily updates to my Facebook page, and then before you know it, I've almost run out of time to troll YouTube. God, what I wouldn't give for more hours in my day. Luckily, YouTube's celebration of egalitarian creativity means that among the hundreds of old newscasts and videos of cats farting (seriously—do a search), I've stumbled upon some pretty funny game-related stuff. Because today's woman knows how important it is to take a pause during her busy schedule, run a delightful bubble bath, and laugh her ass off. – *Kristen Salvatore*



NAME: World of Warcraft: Dancing
URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=066_q4DIeqk
Someone has kickass animation skills and a Netflix subscription.



NAME: Fear of Girls
URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmgLOKRl5J0
Peek into the life of an elite game master. Vampires aren't evil—football players are.



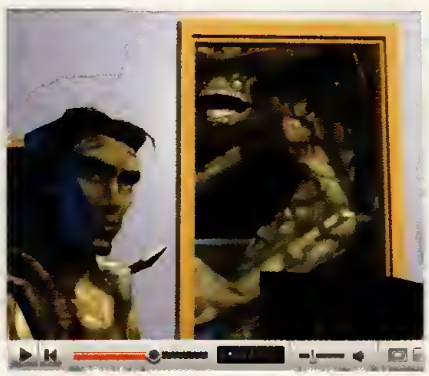
NAME: Real Transformers
URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=akNJ6S2UqsE
Unbelievable examples of DIY creativity by grown men with hot glue guns.



NAME: Lightning Bolt, aka, Ogre Battle
URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ufaBKdY60w
Skilled thespians bring to life the excitement and drama of an epic battle against the ogre menace.



NAME: Guild Wars vs World of Warcraft
URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcWXL8jpFGs
As the war rages between these two MMO juggernauts, only one test of skills can determine the true winner: dance-off!



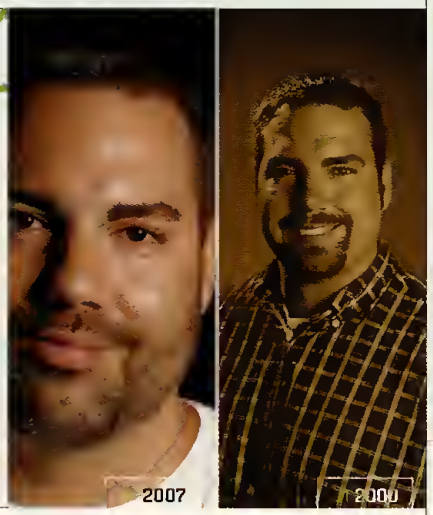
NAME: Summoner Geeks
URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zng5kRle4FA
A YouTube classic takes the piss out of D&D players, MMO characters, and pretty much anyone reading or writing this magazine.

MAXIMUM PC

MOD SHOP

Coming September 2007

DESTINY TAKES A MISTER



Pop culture is my master. Back in the days when I was the assistant/associate editor guy at *PC Accelerator*, one of my jobs was to be a walking encyclopedia of useless information about celebrities, junk food, weird commercials, obscure cartoons, the many spin-offs of *Happy Days*, and the tons of games I'd played as a kid and as a child-like adult.

Today, my massive pile of movies on VHS has turned into *three* massive piles of movies on DVD. My blurry, old Zenith cathode ray tube TV has been replaced by a 42-inch hi-definition plasma. Oscar-winning infant collector Angelina Jolie has portrayed Lara Croft twice. And professional ass-hat Uwe Boll is excreting craptastic videogame movies faster than he can box their critics, simultaneously ending the careers of Christian Slater and Tara Reid (2005's *Alone in the Dark*) in the process. Okay, maybe the guy's not *all* bad.

PC games are shaping our popular culture now more than ever. From *Silent Hill* comic books to the *Doom* movie starring The Rock, there's hardly a nook or cranny of the virtual world that some suit won't exploit to make a buck…err, I mean, fulfill the needs of the fans. Believe me, when the inevitable big-budget movie based on *Peggle* hits theaters, I'll be the first in line. (You'll *believe* that a unicorn can play *Pachinko*!)

The point is: We won. The PC gaming generation is the trend-setter, the market-leader, the kiss from a rose…in short, the people who matter to pop culture. When *World of Warcraft* is up for an Emmy (and may have even won it by the time you read this) thanks to its inclusion in a *South Park* episode, we've officially arrived. So, it's time to consider, what's next?

I propose total global domination. We must become the Alliance to the non-gamer Horde (or vice-versa if you swing that way) and let our geek flag fly. First, you'll have to become one with the gamer lifestyle, which – congratulations! – you're well on your way to doing now that you've bought this magazine. Second, purchase a TV network, movie studio, radio station, or newspaper. It's harder than it may sound, but I have faith in you. Finally, fill the airwaves and print with crap that'll annoy *future* generations – may I suggest Jessica Alba as Lord British in CSI: Tabula Rasa?

Okay, that last suggestion sucks. But to quote Doc Brown from *Back to the Future III*, "Your future is whatever you make it. So make it a good one." Our culture belongs to you, Mr. Taste Maker, so put your mark in it. Whenever someone asks me what the legacy of PCXL is, my answer is "We brought back the fun." And when you compare pre-PCXL gaming mags to the ones out now, you'll agree that we did.

CHUCK OSBORN
SENIOR EXECUTIVE EDITOR, PC GAMER (AND FORMER ASSOCIATE EDITOR FOR PCXL)

P.S.
(True confession: The PCXL guys used to refer to PC Gamer as PC Lamer, and laughed that its readers were a bunch of old, bearded guys with pot-bellies. Now that I'm older, bearded, rounder, *and* senior executive editor for PC Gamer, the irony is not lost on me.)





POPULAR CULTURE

IN THIS SECTION

THE BEST COMICS YOU'VE NEVER READ
NOT YOUR DADDY'S ACTION FIGURES
COLLECTIBLES WE CAN'T AFFORD
MOVIES WE WANT TO SEE NOW
DVD / HD DVD / BLU-RAY PICKS


"MY EYES ARE UP HERE, LADIES."

COMIC BOOKS

YOU CAN CALL THEM GRAPHIC NOVELS, BUT THAT'S JUST BEING PRETENTIOUS

Ask any comic book geek for advice about getting into comics and they'll give you the same three answers: *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, and *Kingdom Come*. But after finishing those gateway comics, you're left with vast selection of characters and stories to continue your nerd initiation. Ongoing series like *Superman* and *X-Men* vary in quality from month to month, but there are a few titles are dependably brilliant. You won't regret checking out any of our following recommendations.

1



2



3



4



5



6



1 NEXTWAVE

Morvel Comics

http://www.morvel.com/nextwove/

Morvel Universe nobodys teom up to ruin the plons of on evil mego-corporotion utilizing Unusuol Weopons of Moss Destruction. Hystericol oction ensues.

2 PUNISHER

MAX Comics

http://www.morvel.com/

This version of Fronk Costle is over 50 yeors old ond os bodoss os ever. A foolish mob boss decides to moke o nome for himself by violoting the groves of Punisher's deod family. Guess who gets gutted?

3 THE AUTHORITY

Wildstorm

http://www.dccomics.com/wildstorm/

Superpowered orchetypes inspired by the Justice Leogue decide to moke the world o better ploce through force.

4 WORLD WAR HULK

Morvel Comics

http://www.morvel.com/universe/Plonet_Hulk

A secret gothering of the world's most powerful heroes decide to bonish the Hulk from Eorth. Now he's returned, ond ongrier thon ever. Smoshing commences.

5 INVINCIBLE

Imoge Comics

http://www.imogecomics.com/

Teenoger Mork Grayson is Invincible, son of the world's greotest superhero. After his dormont powers octivate, he must leorn how to cope with being o hero while confronting his mysterious heritoge.

6 Y: THE LAST MAN

Vertigo Comics

http://www.dccomics.com/vertigo/

All the moles on the plonet hove suddenly died, sove for Yorrick Brown. Turns out being the lost mon isn't os greot os it sounds.

ACTION FIGURES

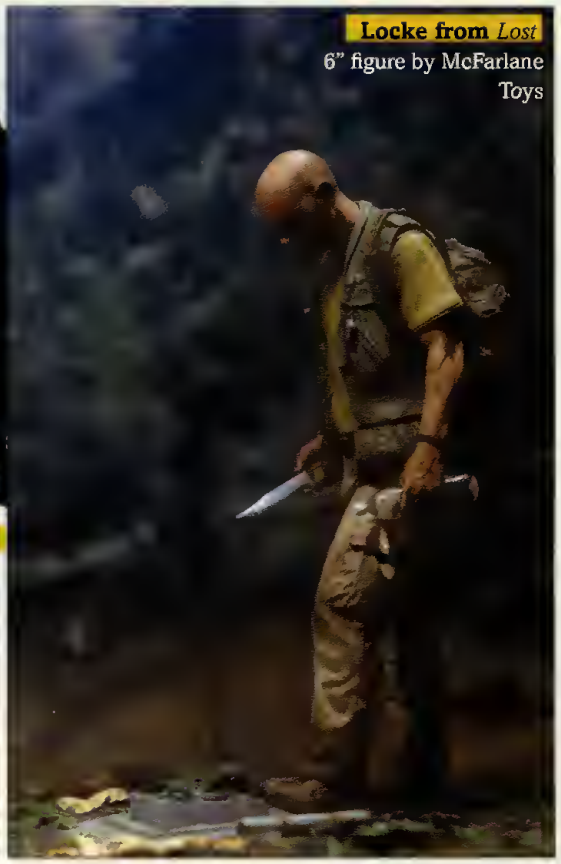
THE PRIDE OF ANY DISPLAY CASE

We used to collect comic book action figures in grade school, but those toys were meant to be played with on the schoolyard. The best action figures today are more like diorama set pieces - pre-posed miniature models fit for keeping your DVDs company on the bookshelf. Intricately sculpted and painted with meticulous detail, the collectible figures from McFarlane Toys and Neca are a cut above other toymakers' offerings. Here're a few of our favorites from their impressive collection.



V from *V for Vendetta*
7" figure by Neca

Hitman from *Hitman: Blood Money*
12" figure by Neca



Locke from *Lost*
6" figure by McFarlane Toys

Solid Snake from *Metal Gear Solid 2*
6" figure by McFarlane Toys



Jack Bauer from *24*
6" figure by McFarlane Toys



Leonidas from *300*
12" figure by Neca



Raiden from *Metal Gear Solid 2*
6" figure by McFarlane Toys

BECOME AN ACTION FIGURE



HOW YOU CAN DESIGN YOUR OWN MINI-ME

If you have the cash and sufficient vanity, head over to Andgor Toys (**www.andgor.com**) or Herobuilders (**www.herobuilders.com**), where you can commission a custom action figure based on your likeness. Both companies offer several package options for designing a custom sculpt, requiring only that you send several headshots to begin the process. The custom mold isn't cheap – the first figure can cost over $500 dollars, but you'll get a high quality miniature that'll probably be better than anything you could make on your own.

We wonder if the sculptors at Neca had access to *Tomb Raider Legend* model Korimo Adebibe for reference purposes.

Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*
12" figure by Neca





Jack from *Lost*
6" figure by McFarlane Toys



Young *Beowulf*
6" figure by McFarlane Toys





CRAZY COOL COLLECTIBLES

FINE ART FOR THE ADOLESCENT AT HEART

SIDESHOW SHOWCASE

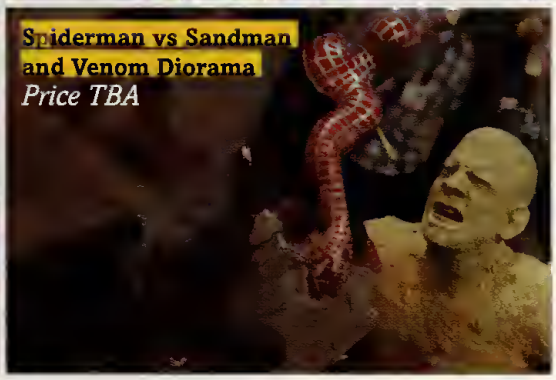
Here's a sneak peek at some pre-production maquettes from Sideshow Collectibles that we glimpsed at Comic-Con. Full product and pre-order info at www.sideshowtoy.com



Limited Edition Stealth Iron Man
$300



Captain America
Price TBA



Spiderman vs Sandman and Venom Diorama
Price TBA

WETA WORKSHOP WONDERS
FREAKIN' RAY GUNS!

[img: weta_book.jpg]
Dr. Grordborts Infallibale Aether Oscillators is Weta Workshop's line of antique styled sci-fi raygun props, the perfect finishing touch to any steampunk getup. Details at www.wetanz.com/rayguns/







RUSTIC REALISM
Weta uses a proprietary painting technique to make the metal on these ray guns look rusted.



Spartan Sword Prop Replica

BECOME A SPARTAN WARRIOR FROM *300*
SPOILER ALERT: 299 DIE

Everything you need to repel a barbarian invasion, all found at www.necaonline.com



Life-Size Spartan Cape Prop Replica



Leonidas Helmet Prop Replica

Spartan Shield Prop Replica

**PCXL does not condone the use of any of these props to engage in battle. Don't be an idiot.*

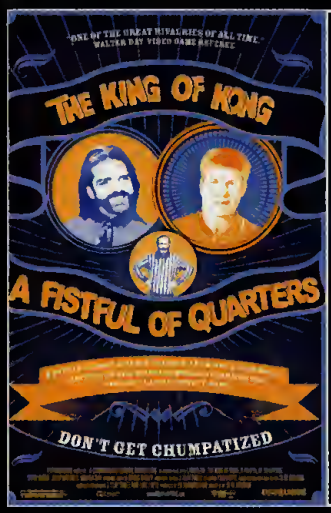
MOVIES

FILMS YOU JUST CAN'T MISS, UNLESS YOU'RE A STUCK-UP FILM MAJOR

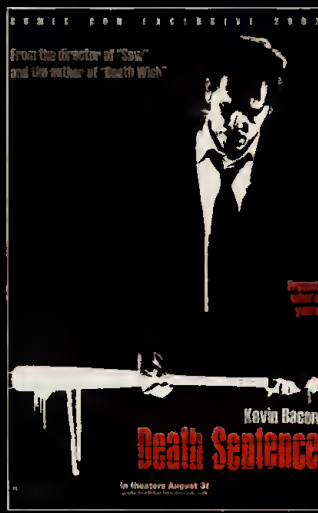
The local cineplex is still the best place to spend two hours enjoying the latest popcorn flick while making out with your best friend's sister. Even though this past summer's offerings were huge disappointments (we hate you Sam Raimi), the movies closing out the year and the ones coming in 2008 show much more promise. As cinemaphiles, these are the movies we'll be waiting line for the midnight of their release.



SUPERBAD
Arrested Development's Michael Cera joins Jonah Hill as two buddies celebrating their last week of high school. Booze and cops add to the fun.
Out now!



THE KING OF KONG
High score nut (and Hot Sauce mogul) Billy Mitchell defends his long-standing *Donkey Kong* score in this absorbing documentary.
Out now!



DEATH SENTENCE
Looks like some thugs didn't get the memo. No one messes with Kevin Bacon and lives to regret it. Revenge never looked so painful.
Out now!



SHOOT'EM UP
Clive Owen's ballistics romp takes the crown away from *The Transporter* as the most ridiculously kinetic action movie ever.
September 7th, 2007







I AM LEGEND
Will Smith stars as the lonely hero in this adaptation of a classic vampire story. It's the *Omega Man* all over again.
December 14th, 2007



IRON MAN
Robert Downey Jr. perfectly captures the look and swagger of Tony Stark, weapons designer turned armored superhero.
May 2nd, 2008



THE DARK KNIGHT
By far the most anticipated movie of summer 2008, Batman returns to the big screen to face the Joker.
July 18th, 2008

DVDS

THE 'V' ACTUALLY DOESN'T STAND FOR "VIDEO" – IT'S ACTUALLY SHORT FOR "VERSATILE"

Movies are the de-facto gift for a birthday or holiday if can't decide what buy for a friend. If you're going to resort to giving movies as presents, the least you can do is put some thought into what DVDs you'd be giving away. But if you're too lazy to do even that, feel free to use our picks below. We can't guarantee that our choices will please everyone – just people who're dorky like us. Find all of these vids on Amazon.com



Robot Chicken – Season Two Uncensored

$20 Seth Green's irreverent animated series using action figures pokes fun at TV, movies, and celebrity. This two disc set contains over four hours of uncensored episodes from the latest season.



The Office – Season Three

$33 After the heartbreaking cliffhanger at the end of season two, Pam and Jim begin the third season of our favorite sitcom working in separate branches of Dunder-Mifflin. Will they ever reunite and resolve their sexual tension?



Entourage – Season Three

$27 Unapologetically hip and hilariously well-written, the third season of Entourage follows movie superstar Vincent Chase after the release of his *Aquaman* movie. His buddies are all back too to mooch off his success.



Hot Fuzz

$20 Far and away the funniest movie of the year, *Hot Fuzz* is the follow up to the cult favorite *Shaun of the Dead*. Parodying buddy cop movies, the result is a finely crafted comedy that never gets old, even after multiple viewings.



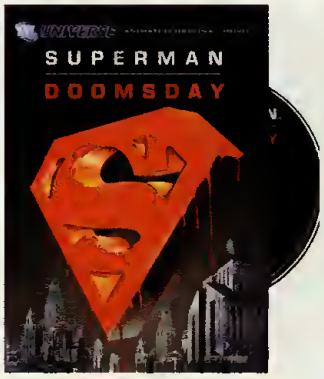
The Prestige

$15 One of our favorite movies of last year. Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman play rival magicians. Director Christopher Nolan has proved to be a master of obsession, an ominous theme which resonates throughout the entire film.



Pan's Labyrinth

$21 Guillermo Del Toro is forgiven for the debacle of *Blade II* with this magical fairy tale for adults. The stunning imagery and masterful performances gives us chills to this day.



Superman: Doomsday

$14 Only on DVD September 2007, this DC comics produced animated film is the first from the company to be rated PG-13. Superman fights for his life as he faces a foe stronger than any he's ever encountered…



Serenity Collector's Edition

$19 Browncoat or not, you'll love this witty space western. It's geek master Joss Whedon's directorial debut, and the *Buffy* creator doesn't disappoint.

Win a free copy of *Superman: Doomsday*! Just send an email to **norman@pcgamer.com** with "Lex Luthor" in the subject line. 10 random winners will be chosen by November 4th.

HD DVD AND BLU-RAY

THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE FORMATS IS THE USE OF A HYPHEN



Planet Earth

$67 Format: *HD DVD and Blu-Ray*

Filmed entirely in high-definition, this 11 part series captures Earth's diverse geographical locales, from the depths of the planet's oceans to the peaks of its highest mountains.



Blade Runner Ultimate Collector's Edition

$70 Format: *HD DVD and Blu-Ray*

Packaged in a collectible briefcase-shaped box, this definitive cut of the seminal sci-fi thriller features remastered footage and newly filmed scenes. Sir Ridley Scott oversaw the production of this set, which actually includes *five* different versions of the movie.



300

$28 Format: *HD DVD and Blu-Ray*

Testosterone driven violence has never looked so good. Zack Snyder's adaptation of Frank Miller's stylized comic stays very true to the source.



Casino Royale

$27 Format: *Blu-Ray*

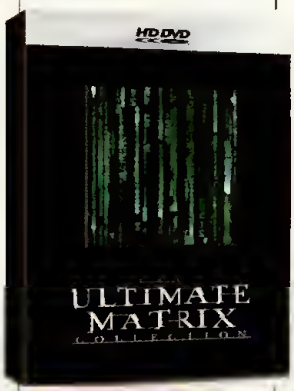
A blond Bond? We too were dubious until we saw how kick-ass Daniel Craig could be as Britain's most celebrated fictional secret agent. From the opening parkour sequence to the numerous bloody fistfights, this Bond relaunch had us saying "Pierce who?"



Heroes - Season 1

$70 Format: *HD DVD*

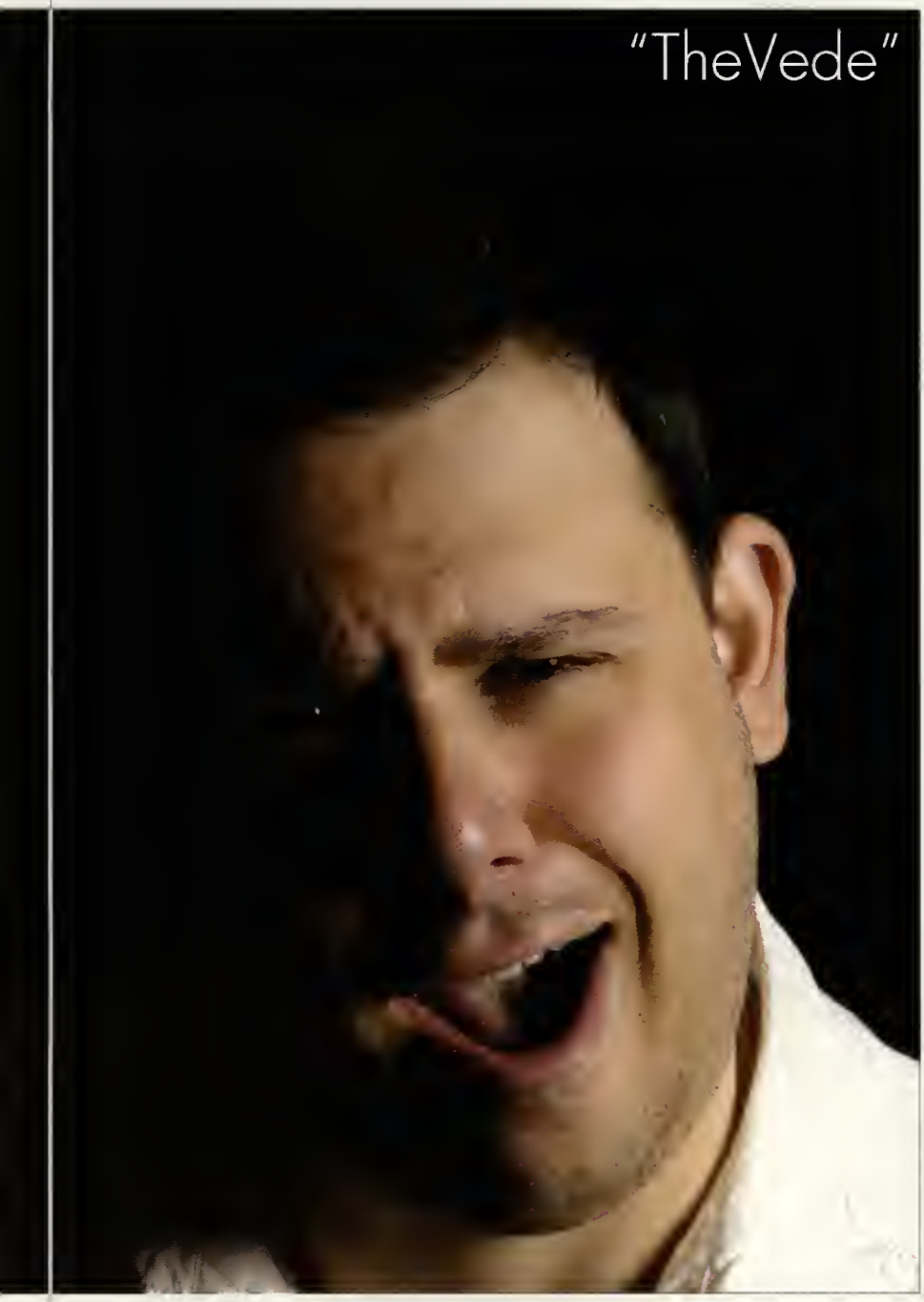
We may be partial to *Lost*, but *Heroes* has captured the nation's attention as the best new drama of the past year. It's also one of the first network hourlongs to be released in a high-definition format.



The Ultimate Matrix Collection

$75 Format: *HD DVD*

As much as the third movie sucked, you have to appreciate the impact the *Matrix* trilogy has has on popular culture and modern filmmaking. The flawless audio and video transfers of the three movies in this set represent the best that high-definition format discs have to offer.



END BOSS

BY GREG VEDERMAN

Contrary to popular belief, you were not put on this Earth to play *World of Warcraft*. You were put here to have kids who play *World of Warcraft*, who will then have kids of their own who play *World of Warcraft*. And so goes the circle of life.

But look, fatty, you're never going to find a girl to have kids with if you don't get your ass up from your computer once in a while, and even after you do that, you're not going to find a truly great girl unless you're willing to play The Game. That's right, I'm telling you that meeting women is just like playing a game—that there are rules you must follow if you want to win. You're a gamer, so that should make you happy. But it doesn't, does it? No, you're sitting there thinking that the right woman should love you just the way you are, that you're a beautiful little flower. Well, get over yourself, because you're a douche: You love anime porn and eat large family-size bags of potato chips in a single sitting.

Sure, maybe there are girls out there who cried at the end of *Shadow of the Colossus*, too, and one of them may be capable of loving you despite your, let's face it, *glaring* flaws, but women like that are few and far between, and in case you haven't been paying attention, they only date your friends.

If you *really* want to meet a girl, here are my tips for elevating yourself above the (literally) unwashed masses.

1 WASH YOUR ASS

Seriously, dude, go wash it. Go wash it *right now*. I used to live with a roommate who was so filthy that his clothes still stank after he took them out of the washing machine. Gross! Girls don't like stink, people. Bathe daily, even if you don't leave the house much, just so you can get in the habit of doing it. (And remember to brush your teeth and shave!)

2 GET SOME NEW CLOTHES

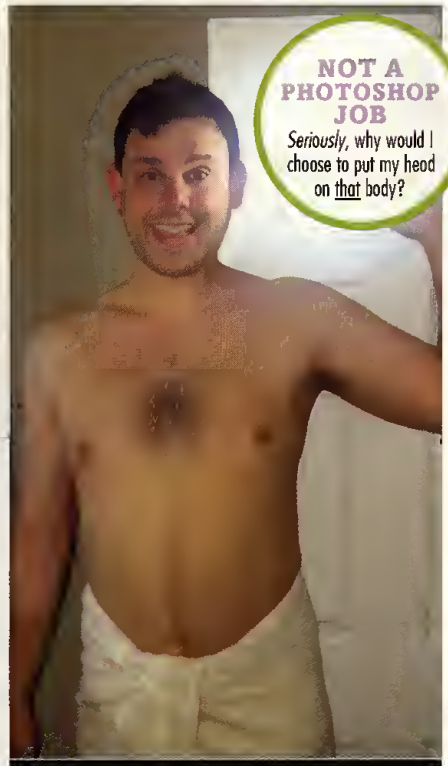
That "+2 Shirt of Dancing (cursed)" tee isn't going to get it done. Go to the mall and find a pretty, young saleswoman. Tell her you're a mess and beg for her help. She'll put you in some respectable clothes.

3 GET A HAIRCUT

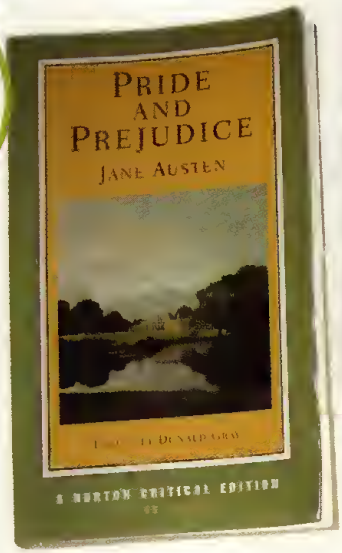
Stop going to Supercuts. Go to a real salon and ask them to do something fashionable with your hair. Make sure it's a style you can maintain. (If you're losing your hair, make sure you keep what you've got nice and short.)

4 DITCH THE GLASSES

Nothing wrong with glasses, four eyes—I used to wear them, too—but unless you look great in yours (and someone other than your mom has told you so), you may want to consider going the



/// Remember: A clean ass is a happy ass. ///



YES!





NOOOOO!

contacts route, at least for when you're out on first dates.

5 NO MORE COMIC BOOKS

No doubt, the latest *World War Hulk* was awesome, but chicks don't want to hear about that shit. Read something women can relate to that they've probably read themselves.

Perfect example: A long time ago, I subscribed to *The New Yorker* magazine so that I'd have a better shot with an attractive Harvard graduate I'd just met. We dated for a year, and even though I'm no longer in that relationship, I still subscribe to *The New Yorker* because it's a wonderful magazine that gives you something socially important to talk about in just about any situation.

Also, as my dad told me when I was growing up, even if you don't care about sports, it's never a bad idea to read the local sports page once or twice a week so that you have something to say in case a "Go Giants!" conversation pops up.

6 BE EXCELLENT

"And this takes us to the [sixth] rule of Being [Vede]: You have to do something excellent in her presence, thus demonstrating your sexual worthiness." Dex from the movie *The Tao of Steve* was really on to something there. So, what are you good at in life that doesn't (necessarily) involve games? Do you play in a band? Do you have any bowhunting skills? Do something impressive (that isn't totally stupid) in front of a girl, and you've got a great "in" with her.

7 BE A JERK

Don't *really* be a jerk on a first date, but don't be a super nice guy, either. Don't let yourself fall into the dreaded friend zone. Sure, talk about puppies and books, but also try steering the conversation toward mildly risqué subjects ("What do you look for in a mate? What gets you excited?") that tests the waters and gets the person sitting across from you thinking about you in a romantic way. (But don't push it too far, Ron Jeremy Jr., or else you'll come off looking like a perv.)



/// See, if you take off the glasses, you may still be able to rock the game tee. ///

8 FIND 'EM ONLINE

If you haven't dated much, finding the confidence to ask a woman out can be difficult, which is why you shouldn't be afraid to online date. Remember, you may be doughier than the next guy, but you're also smarter, so use that keen 18 Intelligence to post a witty, well-written profile on a site like Yahoo Personals or Match.com (I suggest you refrain from sharing your "I cried at the end of *Shadow of Colossus*" anecdote), and with your new look and skillz, you'll be surprised by how easy it can be to meet women.

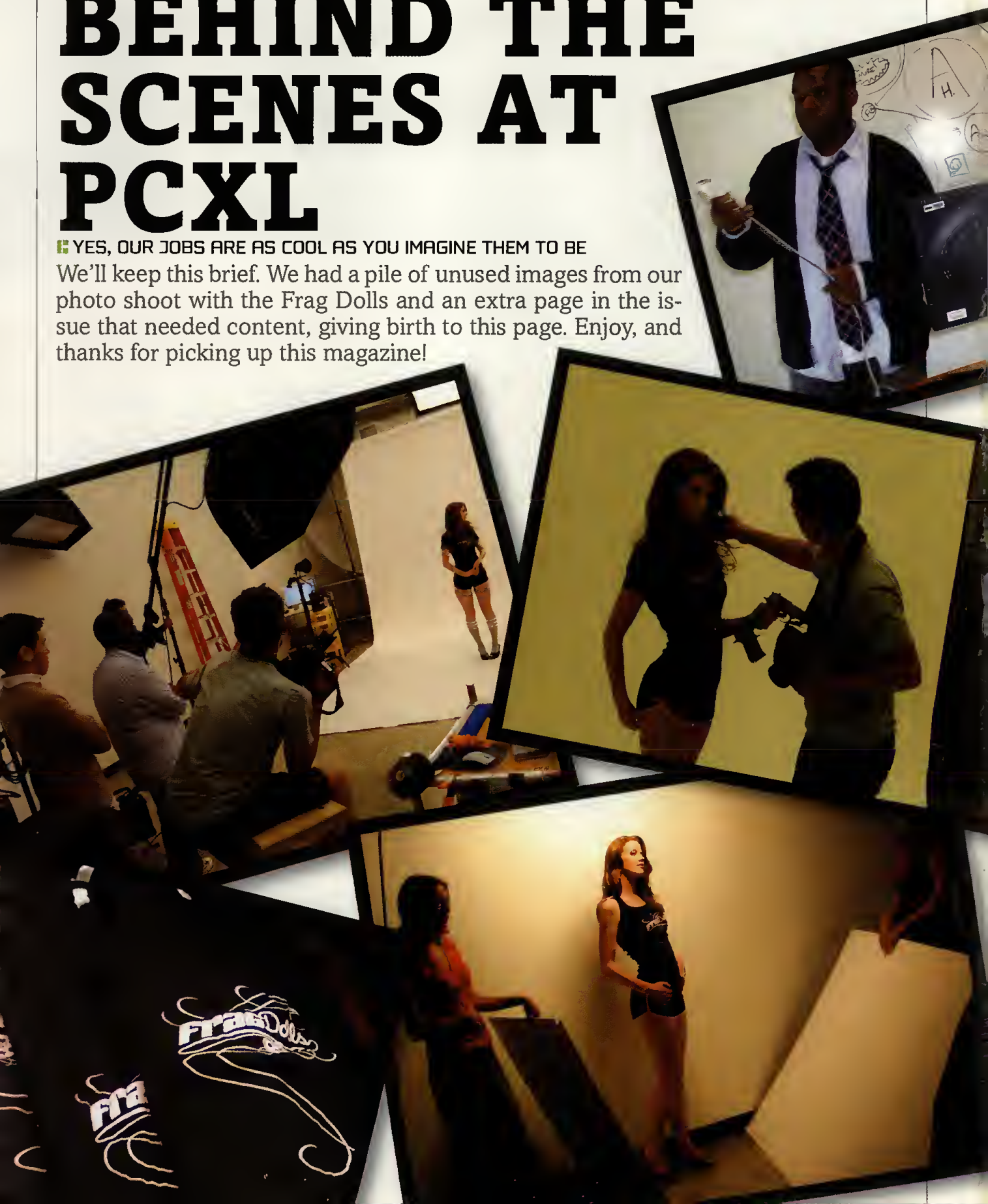
Want more tips, or to tell me that *I'm* a douche? Email me at greg@pcgamer.com

GREG VEDERMAN
IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF PC GAMER MAGAZINE

BEHIND THE SCENES AT PCXL

YES, OUR JOBS ARE AS COOL AS YOU IMAGINE THEM TO BE

We'll keep this brief. We had a pile of unused images from our photo shoot with the Frag Dolls and an extra page in the issue that needed content, giving birth to this page. Enjoy, and thanks for picking up this magazine!



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TEEN
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence

PC DVD-ROM ONLINE SOFTWARE

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